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Naked Power: The Phallus as an Apotropaic Symbol in the Images and Texts of Roman Italy

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Abstract

Representations of the phallus abound in both the art and the literature of the first-century A.D. Roman world. On frescoes in both private homes and public buildings, on amulets, statues, etchings, tripods, drinking cups and vases, exaggerated phallic images, these purportedly apotropaic symbols protect the inhabitant, the passerby, the wearer, the user from outside evil. The contemporary Latin literature, Roman satire and elegy in particular (Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Horace, Tibullus), and the *Priapea*, a collection of poems about the phallic god Priapus, offer descriptions of the phallus and its functions that both coincide with and differ from the material examples. This paper will investigate these correspondences and discrepancies between verbal and artistic representation, and, in particular, what these similarities and inconsistencies reveal about the public function of this private imagery in the contemporary culture of ancient Roman Italy.

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Naked Power
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and Texts of Roman Italy

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2005-2006 Penn Humanities Forum on Word & Image
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Naked Power: The Phallus as an Apotropaic Symbol in the Images and Texts of Roman Italy

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March 17, 2006

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Origins	6
Chapter 2: Priapus: Origins, Cult and Roles	27
Chapter 3: The Material Phallus: Apotropaic Power	41
Pompeii: <i>Interior Decorations</i>	42
Pompeii: <i>Exterior Representations</i>	51
Ostia	58
Museum Phallic Objects	63
Chapter 4: The Phallus in Latin Literature: <i>lasciuam uerborum ueritatem</i>	70
Catullus	71
Martial	76
Juvenal	81
Horace	83
Tibullus	86
<i>Corpus Priapeorum</i>	87
Conclusion	93
Appendix A	98
Appendix B	106
Figures	
Bibliography	

Please visit www.sas.upenn.edu/~cmoser for an interactive map of Pompeii with the locations of phallic representations linked to their corresponding images and bibliographical references.

Introduction

*Carminis incompti lusus lecture procaces,
conveniens Latio pone supercilium...
aut igitur tunicam parti praetende tegendae,
aut quibus hanc oculis aspicias, ista lege.
(Priapea, I)*

Representations of the phallus abound in both the art and the literature of the first-century A.D. Roman world. On frescoes in both private homes and public buildings, on amulets, statues, etchings, tripods, drinking cups and vases, exaggerated phallic images, these purportedly apotropaic symbols protect the inhabitant, the passerby, the wearer, the user from outside evil. The contemporary Latin literature, Roman satire and elegy in particular (Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Horace, Tibullus), and the *Priapea*, a collection of poems about the phallic god Priapus, offer descriptions of the phallus and its functions that both coincide with and differ from the material examples. This paper will investigate these correspondences and discrepancies between verbal and artistic representation, and, in particular, what these similarities and inconsistencies reveal about the public function of this private imagery in the contemporary culture of ancient Roman Italy.

A detailed investigation into and comparative analysis of representations of the phallus in the material and textual evidence will serve to highlight a major divergence in the uses of genital imagery in these different artistic media. The broad range of human activities encompassed by the rich interplay between the solemn and the comic phallus in the material arts acquires a narrower and more ironic focus in the developed verbal arts. The prominent phallic plaques and amulets of the Roman world, evident in the houses of both the rich and the poor, functioning as solemn, apotropaic symbols, do not find their exact correspondence in the comic, invective phallus of contemporary Latin literature. This incongruity may be attributed to the

radically different ways in which the developed visual and verbal arts tend to interact with religious experience---figurative imagery maintaining its mission to establish links between the material world and the semi-divine; imaginative literature, on the other hand, making an effort to secularize and somewhat distance itself from its roots in ritual. A comparison of the overlapping approaches to the phallus in similar material and literary examples--- for example, the comic grotesque phallus of the painted Priapus and the ironic, parodied, religious prayers of the *Priapea*, poems to the ithyphallic deity, Priapus--- will demonstrate how both these representations, in their various ways, play with the conceit of the solemn, religious function of the apotropaic phallus as a symbol to avert the Evil Eye.

Many scholars have examined Roman phallic imagery in terms of eroticism, pornography and sexual orientation, considering the apotropaic uses of the phallus as a secondary component of a broader study of Roman sexuality. But artistic examples of a phallus endowed with magical, protective properties must be looked at separately from other uses of phallic representation in pornographic and erotic studies of sexuality.

This paper focuses on the phallus in Roman art and literature, its solemn and comedic functions. In each section of this paper, both archaeological and literary evidence of phallic representations are investigated to analyze the function of the phallus: is the phallus meant to protect, to attack, or to entertain? Although many of the depictions whose focus was the phallus may appear obscene or pornographic to our modern eyes, to the ancient Romans, the illustrations of the phallus, exaggerated or anatomically detached, as we shall see, were not meant as erotic stimulants: these images, both visual and written, had completely different functions from the contemporary erotic *tabellae* (which can still be seen today) that decorated the walls of bedrooms

in the houses of the rich (the House of the Vettii VI.15.1) or the brothels (VII.12.18-20) of Pompeii.

The first chapter thoroughly investigates the origins of the Roman use of the phallus as an apotropaic symbol. Although this function of the phallus can be seen in both Greece and Etruria, it is much more elaborate, pervasive and prominent in the Roman world. The chapter looks at both physical representations of the phallus in the Greek and Etruscan worlds and each culture's ithyphallic gods. These earlier material examples, from Greek plaques and statues to Etruscan paintings and carvings, provide the elementary basis for the later, expanded discussion of Roman examples. A brief survey of the Greek phallic vocabulary is also included to serve as an introduction to the focused, comprehensive study of Latin phallic language, its euphemisms and metaphors in Chapter 4. The in-depth discussion of the ithyphallic deities from each culture, their phallic rituals, processions, festivals, names or symbolism, allows for a greater understanding of and background to the most prominent Roman phallic deity, Priapus.

Chapter 2 is fully devoted to this important phallic god. Just as the Roman material examples of the phallus can be seen to stem from their Greek and Etruscan predecessors, elaborating and developing an established icon, so too is Priapus a more fully developed, unique amalgamation of each of his ithyphallic divine ancestors. This chapter investigates Priapus' perplexing origins and the consequent spread of his cult, addressing many possible locations, dates and impetuses for the spread of his worship. It is generally held that by the 2nd century B.C., Priapus, endowed with his enormous phallus, and his cult, had spread to Italy. It is at this time and for many centuries thereafter that Priapus begins to take on many different roles (as guardian of gardens or flocks, as god of mercenary culture, as protector deity of mariners and sea-borne traders, as a god associated with death). This chapter will discuss each of these roles,

drawing on literary or archaeological examples for support. But whatever role Priapus may assume, he is always depicted with his exposed, erect, hyperbolically large phallus, an attribute that becomes inseparable from the deity, creating an image of the god as a giant, deified, talking phallus. And no matter what Priapus may be god of, he and his phallus are consistently relied on to protect any realm from evil.

The final two chapters focus on a comprehensive study of the visual and textual representations of the phallus to allow for an investigation of the function of the organ in each media. Chapter 3 examines many different material phallic representations, each characterized by a core, inherent apotropaic function. The chapter begins with an in-depth study of the first-century A.D. Roman city of Pompeii. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D allowed for an excellent state of preservation, enabling a detailed, inclusive study of all the *in-situ* phallic representations. This chapter addresses both Pompeii's interior representations of the phallus, characterized by an exaggeration or grotesqueness that may elicit laughter (on mosaics and frescoes, on floors and on walls) and its exterior depictions, typified by a solemnity that was viewed with religious reverence (on stone plaques and wall paintings, on public or private establishments). The study then expands its scope in terms of geography and time and looks at *in-situ* phallic representations from Ostia, the Roman port city. The analysis of the apotropaic function of the phallus would be incomplete, however, without an examination of the material phallic evidence removed from its original locus and now housed in museums. This section discusses both the more solemn and the more playful artifacts, the religious amulets and the ithyphallic tripods.

Considering that laughter itself was thought to be apotropaic, the phallus in the more playful material representations loosely corresponds to the comic phallus in the written evidence.

But the genitalia in literature lack the central, basic apotropaic function so important in the more amusing of the material artifacts. Chapter 4 carefully analyzes texts of varying genres (elegy, satire, epigrams), each of which depicts the phallus as a symbol to entertain, to elicit laughter. This chapter begins by looking at the use of the phallus, as a primary obscenity or as a comic metaphor, by specific authors (Catullus, Martial and Juvenal). The next section of this chapter examines various Priapic poems (Horace, Tibullus and the eighty poems of the *Priapea*), a section which both recalls Chapter 2's discussion of Priapus' various roles and addresses poems which further aestheticize the religious phallus.

The phallus in art and in literature, though often appearing with the same representational attributes and portrayals, has an inherently different function in each of the media. This discrepancy is not as simple as a difference in genre: the more comic, painted interior depictions of the phallus loosely correlate with the function of the phallus in literature; the *Priapea*, poems addressing or concerning a deity, are religious (though parodic) in essence. The playful, aestheticized, comic phallus could only be possible in a culture and society where the religious phallus played an integral role.

Chapter 1

Origins

The apotropaic symbolism of the phallus seems to have been especially characteristic of Roman Italy. Although there is certainly evidence of this same function applied to the Greek phallus, the association of this semi-religious role with the phallus is much more significant and widespread in Italy. During the third and second centuries B.C., with the influx of Hellenistic culture and beliefs into Italy, knowledge of Greek uses of the phallus traveled to Romanized Italy. Combining with similar customs and imagery that were already native to Italy itself, the Greek ideas and beliefs added to, intensified, or reinforced the already-established use of the protecting phallus. Well before the proliferation of the Roman apotropaic phallus, evidence of the phallus and its role in averting evil can be found in Italy itself, embedded in the art and religion of the archaic Etruscans. But questions of influences and origins aside, it seems as though the Greek and Etruscan phallic gods, art and beliefs were thoroughly reacted to, adapted and developed by the Romans. Indeed, the Roman Italian phallus may develop to some extent from foreign past models; but it evolves into a more important, unique and independent symbol and image than its non-Italic predecessors.

Phallic imagery in public monuments and in ordinary domestic and commercial plaques can be found at different times and places throughout the Greek world. A relief of a phallus was discovered on the island of Thera in the Dorian, Hellenistic colony (Figure 1). This engraved, rock cut, large phallic plaque (1.4m) is placed in the doorway of a residence from the Oea on the island of Thera next to the Greek inscription τοῖς φίλοις (for my friends),¹ an inscription that

¹ Hiller von Gaertringen. *Thera: Untersuchungen, Vermessungen und Ausgrabungen in den Jahren 1895-[1902]* Vol. III. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899-1909 page 238. This type of inscription was common throughout the ancient world in depictions which warded off evil, invoking a counter threat, a further protection. See Slane, Kathleen Warner. "A Knidian Phallic Vase from Corinth." *Hesperia*, Vol. 62, No.4 (Oct.-Dec., 1993), 483-505. pages 490-492. This type

reflects the “benevolent inclusion of friends within the apotropaic protection.”² When the phallus is accompanied by this type of inscription, seen in other contexts as καὶ σὺ, καὶ σοί, or *et tibi, et tibi sit*, the strength of the apotropaic phallus is further reinforced, sometimes promising “retribution in the precise form taken by the evil to be ward off.”³

In another form, on the island of Delos,⁴ there are four monumental sculptures, flanking each side of the “Chapel of Dionysus,” in the form of erect phalli placed on stone bases decorated in relief.⁵ The most interesting sculpted phallus, the most southern one, was erected at the end of the fourth century or beginning of the third century B.C. by the a Delian named Karystios after a celebration of a victorious theatrical performance (Figure 2). The central relief, providing a coherent link to the large, monumental stone phallus, depicts a cock, “zoomorphic and high-necked,” with outstretched claws, in the act of crowing, with a phallus in place of the expected neck and head of the bird and labeled with the inscription *τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Διονύσου* (a votive offering for Dionysus).⁶ The relief to the right, facing south, depicts Dionysus leading a maenad, preceded by a little Silenus. And the relief to the left, facing north, also illustrates Dionysus guiding a maenad who is followed by a goat-footed little

of inscription could be found on tombs in the form of the greeting χαίρε καὶ σὺ given by the dead in answer to a wayfarer’s wish.

² See Levi, Doro. “The Evil Eye and the Lucky Hunchback,” in *Antoich-on-the-Orontes 3*, ed.

Richard Stillwell. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, 220-232. p. 226 for a discussion of other similar inscriptions such as one found on a mosaic covering a threshold of a house in Palermo and on lintels of Syrian houses.

³ Slane, 490.

⁴ Also on the island of Delos phallic plaques with apotropaic symbolism can be found outside houses (on the façade of a house on the street which runs parallel to the *Ouest l’Établissement des Posidoniastes* is an apotropaic phallus with paws; on the northeast corner of The House of the Lake is a granite phallic plaque; in the court between two columns in the House of Skardhana is a granite phallic plaque; in the abandoned remains of the House of the Abundant two animal phalli are found with the inscription “this one is for me, and this one for you.” For specific information and maps about these phallic representations within the city of Delos see Bruneau, Philippe and Jean Ducat *Guide de Delos*. Athens: Ecole Francaise d’Athenes, 1966. (58, 64, 65, 81, 124)

⁵ See Figure 2. These phallic depictions, in an area closely connected with Dionysus, represent the well known symbol of the cult of Dionysus. Bruneau and Ducat, p. 130.

⁶ Csapo, Eric. “Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual and Gender-Role De/Construction.” *Phoenix*, Vol. 51, No. 3/ 4 (Autumn-Winter, 1997), 253-295. 282, 259

Pan.⁷ The iconography of the central relief, presenting the phallic bird of Dionysus,⁸ the sculpture itself, and the inscription clearly indicate a dedication to Dionysus, a god associated with the phallus.⁹ Perhaps this Dionysiac imagery stems from the slang use of the word “neck” for “penis,” a euphemism found in comedy.¹⁰

The phallic aspects of Dionysus himself, his rituals and his associations, seem to find a particular correspondence both in contemporary Etrusco-Roman and in later Roman phallic gods. In ancient Greek cults, Dionysus most often takes on the form of a post, pillar or tree-trunk, border markers “express[ing] his liminal personality.”¹¹ The high, large sculpture dedicated to the god at Delos is a vertical icon that “suggests the upward surge of vegetation,” an association linked to the phallus itself, as a “symbol of the surging life-principle, but also an instrument of possession.”¹²

The varying roles of Dionysus, his connection to theater, mystery cults, wine, ecstasy, can all be linked to the phallus, taking on a symbol of “fertility, of aggression, or an apotropaion” as a Dionysiac phallus.¹³ Many aspects of the cult of Dionysus, his associations with the phallus, his accompanying animals, his chthonic attributes, made the god “especially entitled to

⁷ Bruneau and Ducat, p. 130.

⁸ The phallus-bird would also be paraded around during a festival day in Delos, “flanked on particular by well-born girls” (Sissa and Detienne, 233). Herodotus 2.48 comments on the autonomous, life-like nature of the phallus. A similar representation can also be seen on a relief from Edessa and in a cult tile from Psilax. The phallus bird can be seen in a depiction characterized by phallic imagery on the red-figure amphora (Paris, Petit Palais 307). This vase illustrates a youth with a phallus bird on one side and a woman holding a one-eyed phallus on the other. See John Boardman, “The Phallos-Bird in Archaic and Classical Greek Art,” *Revue Archeologique* (1992-Fasc.2) 227-43. In other depictions from the ancient world, birds rush against the Evil Eye with their hooked beaks. For an excellent example, see the mosaic from the House of Antioch-on-the-Orontes discussed in Chapter 3 in more depth.

⁹ Csapo, 259

¹⁰ Csapo, 283. ἀρθρόν Hdt. 3.87, 4.2; Aristophanes, *HA* 504b23

¹¹ Csapo, 255

¹² Csapo, 258, 260

¹³ Csapo, 259. In 5th century Athenian theatrical productions such as the comedies of Aristophanes, actors wore giant fake phalli for comic effect; in mystery cults, processions and phallic hymns were carried out in honor of Dionysus; the ecstatic state produced from wine and linked to Bacchus is sometimes linked to orgiastic rites.

be considered a protector from the Malignant One.”¹⁴ Dionysus, honored by the symbol of the phallus in festivals, himself becomes “the organ of virility.”¹⁵ As an infant, Dionysus is even represented by a phallus, concealed in the “mystic winnowing-fan/cradle.”¹⁶ (Figure 3) But unlike later Roman phallic gods or earlier Greek gods, Dionysus is almost never depicted as naked; although he is identified as a fertility god, with his power over the vine, in early Greek vase painting he is rarely depicted as an ithyphallic, wild, orgiastic deity, but rather remains “isolated from the sexuality that flourishes all around him.”¹⁷ This illustrated solemnity was somewhat lifted in later Hellenistic and Roman times, with Dionysus taking on youthful characteristics, and, at times, appearing almost drunken.

Not only Dionysus’ depictions but also his rituals have a prominent phallic quality.¹⁸ In Dionysiac processions, at the Rural Dionysia and the *Pompe* of Athens’ Great Dionysia, a phallus which ancient authors¹⁹ describe as “a long piece of timber with leather [or perhaps “figwood”] genitalia on top,” an object that was considered “*comme sacré et restait caché aux*

¹⁴ Levi, 224. Dionysus’ panther would be able to tear the Evil Eye to shreds; his lizards and snakes are both a “mighty *apotropaion*” and harmful.

¹⁵ Sissa and Detienne, *The Daily Life of the Greek Gods*. Trans. Janet Lloyd. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. 235

¹⁶ Csapo, 259, comments that the phallus appears in the *liknon* as early as 375 B.C (and maybe even as early as 440 B.C). One of the best examples of the phallus in the *liknon* can be seen in the paintings from the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii.

¹⁷ Csapo, 261

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion of Dionysiac festivals and processions see Seaford, Richard. *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City State*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. pp-238-251. There are four major festivals of Dionysus in Attica: the rural, or lesser Dionysia celebrated in December (this festival was concerned with the development of drama as part of the honor to Dionysus) ; the Lenaea in January (named after one of the Maenads. It was the setting for the performances of dramas or comedies); the Anthesteria in February (a celebration of the vintage when new wines were tasted); and the City or great Dionysia which took place for an entire week in March to early April. The first three festivals had a local attendance as the weather did not encourage travelers at that time of the year. Although very little evidence remains of these events, it seems that they included a procession, sacrifice, ivy-crowned singing at a low altar, and another (twilight?) procession. Iamblichus in his *On the Mysteries* from the 4th century A.D. comments that the phallus is “the power of generation” and interprets the custom of setting up phalli in honor of Dionysus at his festivals (I.11).

¹⁹ Aristophanes, *Ar.* 243. Plutarch, *Mor.* 527d. Callixeinus, *Athen.* 201e in his account of Ptolemy’s parade. For a non-literary visual depiction of phallic processions, see the Attic black-figured cup from 560 B.C., Florence 3897, which illustrates men parading with phallic poles (Figure 4).

yeux des profanes,”²⁰ was paraded through the streets (Figure 4). During the Rural Dionysia in December, for example, the *komos*,²¹ the performed dance, characterized by its phallic attributes, helped ensure fertility for the coming year. Just as the performers of the contemporary Old Comedy of Aristophanes, wore phallic costumes, the *phallopheroi* (“phallus-bearing” ones) at this festival wore an exaggerated model phallus, a costume which helped to transform the performer or participant into a member of Dionysus’ entourage (Figure 5). In Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (247-279), Dikaio polis privately celebrates a rural Dionysia involving an artificial phallus and obscene language and invoking a *phallikon* (261), a phallic song, in honor of the god Phales.²²

At the Great Dionysia, the phallus was of central importance, for a “phallus was as welcome to Dionysus as a set of warrior equipment and the largest of sacrificial victims were to Athena” at the Panathenaea.²³ Along with his followers,²⁴ Dionysus “exemplifies nature both in its rougher and its more graceful manifestations, all taking part in a celebration of life and growth.”²⁵ The phalli accompanying his satyrs and sileni were often comic: becoming a hook on which one could hang something, a surface on which one can balance a wine cup,²⁶ or even a container for pipes.

²⁰ Csapo, 265, Bruhl, Adrien. *Liber Pater : Origine et Expansion du Culte Dionysiaque à Rome et dans le Monde Romain*. Paris : E.de Boccard, 1953. 4. According to Seaford, page 242 note 27, Archilochos is, in legend, the founder of Dionysiac phallic processions.

²¹ It is from this word that the name “comedy” is derived, with the plays borrowing many of “their slapstick improvisations and phallic songs” (Johns, Catherine. *Sex or Symbol: Erotic Images of Greece and Rome*. London: Collonade Books, 1982. 88)

²² 259-265: And, Xanthias, you two must hold the phallus upright behind the basket-bearer; and I’ll follow and sing the phallic hymn ... Phales, companion of Bacchus, fellow-reveler, night-rover, adulterer and pederast

²³ Sissa and Detienne. page 232-233.

²⁴ Dionysus was often accompanied by his followers: the female devotees (the Maenads or Bacchantes), goats, deer, centaurs, snakes, sileni and satyrs. Satyrs (with goat-like characteristics) and Sileni (with horse-like characteristics) are often confused with the ithyphallic god Pan and also with Faunus. Being part animal, both the Satyrs and the Sileni could behave in ways that would not be commonly acceptable for humans.

²⁵ Johns, 85

²⁶ London BM E810: Red-figure *pyskter* by Douris, 500-475 B.C. (cf. Johns, 32)

Often the phalli of the poles took on human or animal qualities, with head, eyes, ears and other zoomorphic, animal-like attributes, “instruments that seem to be endowed with a life of their own, for they display an eye in the tip, the eye of desire and life, the eye of the animated force of the phallus”²⁷ (Figure 6). Another phallic symbol used in Dionsyiac processions was the thyrsos, a hollow fennel stock with its tip wrapped in ivy, the green plant giving life, growth and fertility to the dead, hollow stock.²⁸ At times this thyrsos was used by the Maenads to ward off the attempts of the satyrs or silenoi who try to seduce them. Ancient authors from the fifth century B.C. attest to the use of phallic poles in the processions and their connection to sacred rites, objects explained by a “sexual affliction in the aetiological myth” which “paid homage to the god.”²⁹ Not only did participants carry phallic poles but they also sang phallic hymns (*ta phallika*).³⁰ Aristotle³¹ even claims that it was from these songs, featuring obscene language and an “indecent display most notably of the fetishized phallus... vestigial (διδυμῶν) survivals from a pre-urban, that is to say, agricultural, era,” that Attic comedy was born.³² The phallic hymns sung in the processions of mystery cults in honor of Dionysus, “enjoyed for their own sake by the ignorant,” represent something much more significant and “shameless” for the members of the cult, something “express[ing], for those who know, one of the opposites, life and death, which the god unites.”³³ The phallus, a symbol of regeneration and fertility, attaches life to

²⁷ Sissa and Detienne, 236

²⁸ Csapo, 260. Burkert, Walter. *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. page 43, comments on the practicality and ubiquity of the thyrsos in ritual: “often the worshipper, approaching an altar or a statue of a god, takes up a branch, or a bundle of branches, while praying... the pragmatic function of using a twig is obvious: it is one of the simplest tools enlarging the force of the arm and its radius of action; it may be used for aggression or at least for keeping other people away, as we see maenads using their thyrsos against greedy satyrs.” Petronius 132.8 uses the word *thyrsos* as a metaphor for the phallus

²⁹ Seaford, p242 note 27; Csapo page 266 tells of the scholiast to Aristophanes’ *Acharians* 243.

³⁰ In a fragment by Herakleitos (15), he states that for Dionysus “they made the procession and sang phallic hymns”

³¹ Poetics, 1449a12

³² Rosen, Ralph *forthcoming* “Comic Aischrology and the Urbanization of *Agroikia*” 4-6

³³ Seaford, 322. Johns page 92 states that the Corinthian oil-flask in phallic form was a type “not infrequently found in graves.”

death, to Hades, a place that is intricately linked with Dionysus.³⁴ As the connection between life and death, bridging the gap between two realms, Dionysus yet again represents his common roles as a boundary god.

Dionysus was not the only phallic god in the Greek world associated with boundaries and liminal guardians; Hermes also played these protective roles. Developed from a marker, a piling of stones denoting a boundary or set up over a grave, herm statues prominent throughout the Greek city and countryside took the form of a rectangular plinth with an erect, “realistically modeled” phallus and arms or side brackets and a bearded head³⁵ (Figure 7). Even the name Hermes is derived from the Greek word meaning a stone set up, *herma*.³⁶ The phallus and the pile of stones do not contain power within themselves but rather are symbols, signals, signs “conveying a message of potency.”³⁷ Herm statues³⁸ were first erected by Hipparchus, son of Pisistratus around 540 B.C to “serve as a kind of milestone” and existed as a type in the Roman period, though “its function became perhaps less religious and more purely decorative as time went on.”³⁹ These statues, identified with Hermes as a protector god, were set up in locations linked with this phallic god’s various associations, an “adaptation to stone sculpture, and for a

³⁴ Dionysus is associated with Hades, and some believed Dionysus and Hades were the same. The word “shameless” (in Greek “anaides”), what the phallus is not, for members of the cult, could also be taken to mean “without Hades.” See Seaford, 320-321 for a more detailed discussion of the connection between Dionysus and Hades.

³⁵ Goldman, Hetty. “The Origin of the Greek Herm.” *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 46, No.1 (Jan.-Mar., 1942), 58-68. 59. Burkert, 39.

³⁶ According to Burkert, 41, Greeks added a stone to a Hermes pile when they passed one

³⁷ Burkert, 41.

³⁸ Herodotus 2.51 states that “these customs...were taken by the Greeks from the Egyptians. It was not so with the ithyphallic images of Hermes; the making of these came from the Pelasgians, from whom the Athenians were the first of all Greeks to take it, and then handed it on to others...the Athenians then were the first Greeks to make ithyphallic images of Hermes, and this they did because the Pelasgians taught them. The Pelasgians told a certain sacred tale about this, which is set forth in the Samothracian mysteries.” Callimachus fragment 199 also mentions Hermes exhibitionist quality in connection with Samothrace.

³⁹ Burkert, 40; Johns, 52. There is a figure of a herm depicted on a piece of Arretine ware from the late 1st century B.C (Boston MFA 04.24), a depiction which may reflect a conflation of Hermes and Priapus

new purpose, of a type which had long dotted the countryside.”⁴⁰ Hermes was especially popular with people from the Celtic provinces due to the conflation of his characteristics with those of their own native gods.⁴¹

The statues were often erected in front of houses, in the market place, at crossroads, frontiers,⁴² boundaries, marking territories of tyrants⁴³ and commemorating victories.⁴⁴ In his urban guise, Hermes, son of Zeus, a god of travel and a messenger of the gods, was often depicted with winged boots, holding a caduceus, a herald’s staff, and with the exception of herms, was usually not ithyphallic⁴⁵ (Figure 8). The rustic herm, however, protecting flocks, parallels the rustic Dionysus, a god who “*s’étendaient à toute la vie végétative.*”⁴⁶ The country herm, like Dionysus in that same role, served as an apotropaic power, “strong in proportion to his resemblance to man, or, in other words, to his partial anthropomorphism.”⁴⁷ In fact, it has been suggested that the type statue of the herm was “originally created for Dionysus and transferred from him to Hermes.”⁴⁸ And Dionysus himself, rarely depicted as an ithyphallic god, is seen in the nude in the form of a herm statue⁴⁹ (Figures 9-10). The connection between Hermes and Dionysus can also be seen in an epigram from Lesbos in which Hermes is asked to bless the

⁴⁰ Goldman, 67.

⁴¹ Silvanus, another ithyphallic rustic god, was also worshipped in the Celtic provinces of the Roman Empire as well as in Italy.

⁴² For Herms at frontiers see Paus. 2.38.7; 8.34.6 and *Anth Pal.* 9.316

⁴³ Hipparchus set up herms in the midway between the village and the agora, inscribed with moral epigrams.

⁴⁴ Cimon celebrated his victory at Eion in Thrace by setting up 3 herms inscribed with epigrams in the Athenian agora. From this construction, the “Stoa of Herms” acquired its name.

⁴⁵ Johns, 52-54.

⁴⁶ Bruhl, 4.

⁴⁷ Goldman, 61.

⁴⁸ Goldman, 67.

⁴⁹ See the red figure amphora by the Nikon Painter, 475-450 B.C., Johns, 81.

vineyard with growth and fertility, a locale in which Dionysus, a god connected to wine, is the dominant spirit.⁵⁰

The herm statue displayed a prominent, erect phallus “serving as a reminder of the powerful magic residing in the altered male member” for once the “sexual organ was uncovered, its power was unleashed”⁵¹ (Figure 11). The herm statue’s location at crossroads, in fields, as boundaries, at athletic finish lines and other possibly dangerous, liminal spaces, suggests that its conspicuously erect phallus may have served a protective, apotropaic power, warding off trespassers, enemies, or instilling good luck and protection.⁵² Plutarch suggested that the indecency and “strange look” of the phallus catch the sight of the Evil Eye, averting danger, so that the Eye exerts less pressure upon its victim.⁵³ And just like the later connections between the phallus or phallic gods and fire, Hermes too can be linked to fire; for “as the inventor of fire produced by rubbing two sticks together, he was also active in promoting sexual union between the woman and the man.”⁵⁴ The apotropaic role of the phallus, linked to statues of Hermes with possible Dionysiac origin, serves to further connect both these gods of boundary; the very idea of boundary lines and borders, dangerous places needed to be protected in both Greece and Italy, is therefore intrinsically linked with the semi-religious, defensive phallus.

Contemporary with many of these Greek examples, the phallus as an apotropaic symbol was also prominent in Italy. Detailed examinations of archaic and early republican Roman syncretisms of the native Italian and the Greek phallus have shown that these unions have

⁵⁰ Goldman, 63 note 30

XVI-I. [Ζ]ηνὸς καὶ Μαΐας ἐρικυδέος ἀγλαὸν Ἑρμῆ[ν] εὐκάρπρον [στ]ῆ[σ]εν [τ]ό[νδ]ε [ἐ]πὶ φυταλῆς Βάκχων Ζωοῦς υἱὸς ὅπως ῥαδινῇ διὰ παντὸς ἀμπελος ὥραϊον καρπὸν ἔχη βοτρυῶν. ἀλλ’ Ἰλαος, ἄναξ, Ζωοῦς γένος εὐφρονι θυμῶι σῶιζε, διδοῦς αὐτοῖς ἀφθονον ὄλβον αἰεί.

⁵¹ Bonfante, Larissa. “Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art.” *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 93, No.4 (Oct., 1989), 543-570. 549, 544.

⁵² Apollodorus FGrHist 244 F 129 mentions bedposts in the forms of herms intended to keep away frightful dreams.

⁵³ *Q.conv.* 682a. Other ancient authors stated how the Greeks generally saw the Herms as ‘laughable.’ Aristophanes, *Nub.* 539; Pollux 7, 108; Plat. *Leg.* 8 16d, 935bd.

⁵⁴ Sissa and Detienne, 239.

usually "taken place through Etruscan intermediaries."⁵⁵ Native Italian phallic representations also served as models for the later Roman use of the phallus. In Etruria, the widespread belief in the evil eye manifested itself in many different forms: in reliefs on plaques, in painted depictions in tombs, in inscriptions. The phallus occurs in each of these media, a protection from evil, a guarantee of safety. Just as the engraved phallic plaque from Thera and the Greek Herm, with his erect phallus, were placed at boundary lines or other liminal places, so too was Etruscan phallic iconography. On the ancient wall of the Etruscan city Todi, in Umbria, a phallic plaque was placed, as if protecting the city from the dangers of outside invaders. Examples can also be found on city walls of Alatri in Lazio, on the via Flaminia just south of Narni, and on the walls of Terra di Cesi, near Terni (Figures 12-13).

In Etruria, it seems as though the apotropaic phallus was connected not only with liminal spaces and entrances but also with death, an association that can perhaps be linked to the possible derivation of the Greek Herm as a tomb marker. Both inside and outside of tombs in Etruria, the phallus acts as a protection, perhaps from the evil spirits who haunt the dead, perhaps as a symbol of good luck and safe passage into the next world. Just as the phallic plaques on the city walls warded off evil, so too does the phallic plaque found on the door of the ancient Castel d'Asso tomb in Etruria.⁵⁶

Once inside the tomb itself, the Etruscans seem to use many different symbols to ward off evil. In the Tomb of the Bulls in Tarquinia, there are two sets of figures and scenes, each "obscene" (Figure 14). The scene depicts naked Troilus, Priam's young, beautiful son, en route to a fountain below Troy where Achilles awaits in ambush. The nudity of Troilus may be used to

⁵⁵ Palmer, Robert E.A. *Roman Religion and Roman Empire: Five Essays*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974. 28.

⁵⁶ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/Europe/Italy/_Periods/Roman/Archaic/Etruscan/_Texts/D/ENETR*/38.html Note 8.

portray him as “young and heroic, beautiful and aristocratic,” or it could be “used for magic apotropaic reasons; or...represent[ing] weakness and vulnerability.”⁵⁷ Troilus’ nudity may also represent a sexual appeal; ancient sources⁵⁸ and illustrations attest to Achilles’ love for Troilus, a tradition that may explain the surrounding sexual scenes. On the left side of the illustrated panel, a man penetrates a woman who is supported on the back of a man bent on all fours. Moving to the right in the depicted scene towards two men having sexual intercourse, the ithyphallic bull has clearly defined and distinct horns; in ancient (and modern) Italy, the “single horn is also a potent weapon to spear the Evil Eye.”⁵⁹

The bulls of this tomb can also be connected to the phallic Greek god, Dionysus; amulets often depicted the head of a bull and a phallus together, a combination that was considered apotropaic⁶⁰ (Figure 15). The use of the horn to ward off evil can also be seen in the Tomb of the Lioness also in Tarquinia, decorated both with both lions, animals known as enemies of the evil eye, and with a figure making the sign of the horn against the Evil Eye (Figure 16). In other painted tombs from Tarquinia the sexual and scatological illustrations were considered apotropaic symbols⁶¹: a pale winged phallus is painted on the left wall of the Tomb of the Little Mouse⁶² (Figure 17); a man, Aranth, is defecating or farting on the left wall of the Tomb of the

⁵⁷ Bonfante, Larissa. “Etruscan Sexuality and Funerary Art.” in Sexuality in Ancient Rome. Ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Holloway, R. Ross. “The Bulls in the ‘Tomb of the Bulls’ at Tarquinia.” *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), 447-452. 447; Bonfante, 565.

⁵⁸ Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* (1.474). For iconographic parallels: Bruno d’Agostino in “Achille e Troilos: Images, texts et assonances,” *AION*, 7 (1985) 1-8, mentions a stamnos in the Louvre.

⁵⁹ Holloway, 449.

⁶⁰ An example of a bull’s head phallic pendant can be seen in Plouviez, Judith. “Whose Good Luck? Roman Phallic Ornaments from Suffolk.” Image, Craft and the Classical World: Essays in honour of Donald Bailey and Catherine Johns. Ed Nina Crummy. Montagnac: Editions Monique Mergoïl, 2005. page 159 #7. This pendant depicts a phallus that projects from the bull’s nose, the rounded projections at the side of the shaft representing either testicles or the bull’s nostrils.

⁶¹ Bonfante, “Etruscan Sexuality and Funerary Art,” 162.

⁶² Steingraber, Stephan. Etruscan Painting : Catalogue Raisonné of Etruscan Wall Paintings. New York : Johnson Reprint Corp., 1986. page 349 #119

Jugglers⁶³ (Figure 18). For just as the horn is a spear to evil forces, so too is the phallus, for “it is certainly the vitality and the piercing aspects of the phallus that give it its potency against the evil eye.”⁶⁴

This potentially violent character of the phallus, as a protector of safety and a warder off of evil, as a threat to the envious, can be seen in an inscription from the southern Etruscan town of Saturnia. Engraved on a wall which almost certainly had an accompanying depiction of a phallus above or below it was the inscription “envious one, who cast your gaze here, for you this is the punishment that lies in wait.”⁶⁵

The phalli of Etruscan Italy almost seem to take on a more active, aggressive role than those of Greece; they are not just delimited, secondary attributes of a god whose duty it is protect, but rather they have become independent entities standing in their own proper right as barriers, as protectors, as active threats to the evil eye, to danger, to misfortune. Though many examples of the phallic icons have the same placements (doorways, walls, boundaries, graves) and associations (protection and warding off evil) in both Greece and Etruria, it is their striking individuality and the variety of the images that they are linked with that enhance the power of the Etruscan phallus.

Many of the pre-Roman, Italian ritual processions or practices exhibit phalli as emblems of a god, goddess or ritual belief. The cults and worship of the Vestal Virgins, Dionysus, Liber, Mutunus Titunus and later Priapus, with their involvement in “orgiastic ceremonies,” all seem to rely on the symbolism of the phallus as a form of assertion or protection.⁶⁶ The Vestal Virgins,

⁶³ Steingraber, page 310 # 70

⁶⁴ Holloway, 449 note 15.

⁶⁵ Slane, 489.

⁶⁶ Johns, page 42, states that there were many ithyphallic male deities associated with fertility in the ancient world, that there is “no clear and sharp distinctions between some of the gods...that there must have been many local versions of these basic fertility cults... they are all basically religious in function and intention, and to classify them in any way as obscene or licentious would be to misunderstand completely their meaning in their ancient context.”

characterized by virginity and purity, believed to be either wives or daughters of the early kings of Rome, became especially prominent beginning in the Republic period when Vesta became the hearth goddess of the Roman state.⁶⁷ The Vestal Virgins were prized for their chastity for it “seems as if the virgin was not looked upon as sterile but as a mediator of stored up, potential procreative power.”⁶⁸

This internal procreative power is represented physically by the sacred, undying fire in their shrine. The flame itself can be seen both as sterile, attested to by Dionysius of Halicarnassus as “incorrupt” and “the purest of divine things”⁶⁹ and, at the same time, as procreative, documented by Varro⁷⁰ who states that “*mas ignis, quod ibi semen.*”⁷¹ Fire is also linked to the conception of Roman heroes such as Servius Tullius⁷² and Romulus,⁷³ who were each conceived from a phallus that emerged from a fire. And, as the object occupying the central and most important position of the shrine, fire is “firmly designate[ed]...as the prime object of worship.”⁷⁴ The fire, its burning evoking concepts of passion and erotica, in its male and procreative role, in its associations with fertility, finds its parallel and support in the phallic relief on the wall on the temple of Vesta.⁷⁵ In Roman religion, the phallus, or *fascinus* as Pliny refers to it, could take on a religious role. Pliny, in his *Natural Histories*, attests to the presence of a *fascinus* in the temple of the Vestals, used to ward off evil and protect the sacred shrine; the

⁶⁷ Claridge, Amanda. *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 102.

⁶⁸ Beard, Mary. “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins.” *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 70 (1980), 12-27. 15.

⁶⁹ Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom* II, 66, 2

⁷⁰ *Lingua Latina* v, 61

⁷¹ Beard, 24.

⁷² Pliny NH 36.70, 36.204

⁷³ Plutarch *Rom.* II, 3-5.

⁷⁴ Beard, 25.

⁷⁵ On page 209, Elaine Fantham (“Sexual Comedy in Ovid’s *Fasti*: Sources and Motivation.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 87 (1983), 185-216) writes about the convergence of Priapus with the Vestal Virgins, linked by their joint phallic sexuality.

fascinus was a guardian “which the Vestals worship as a god among the Roman rites.”⁷⁶ It is in this society of early Rome that even the goddesses associated with chastity and virginity were closely linked to and dependent on the phallus as a protective, apotropaic symbol. The fire and the *fascinus* sacred to the Vestal Virgins are not the only phallic associations connected with these “pure and chaste” women: there was a popular, ancient belief that the asses of Priapus were kept by the Vestals, a belief that “arose from their veneration of Mutinus Titinus and his phallus.”⁷⁷

Around the same time, toward the end of the third century B.C., the Bacchanalia, a cult imported from South Italy and introduced to Rome soon after the wars with Hannibal, paid worship to Thracian or Theban Dionysus, whose ceremonies were “the wildest frenzies of religious excitement.”⁷⁸ The cult of Dionysus/Bacchus in Italy, however, can be traced back to the 5th century B.C. as the Avral Hymn attests.⁷⁹ In processions, participants carried phallic poles, a thyrsos, or even personified phallic rods; the unveiling of the phallus constituted an important rite of Dionysiac celebrations.⁸⁰ The extreme behavior of this cult, including possible orgies, crimes, and human sacrifices, was quelled with a senatorial decree in 186 B.C. banning the Bacchanalia throughout Rome and Italy.⁸¹

Linked to the importation of Greek Dionysus, whose “cult and mysterious rites also used the phallus as a talisman,” the native Italian god Liber also had strong phallic associations and

⁷⁶ Pliny *NH* 28.7

⁷⁷ Palmer, 201. For Priapus and his connection with the ass see Chapter 2 of this paper

⁷⁸ Kiefer, Otto. *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*. New York: Kegan Paul International, 2000. 118

⁷⁹ Palmer, 273 note 69. *CIL* I² 2=ILS 5039=ILLRP 4. This hymn “incorporated the already Latinized *thriambos* as *triumpe*.”

⁸⁰ Bruhl, 26. For a more detailed discussion of the phallic instruments used in connection with Dionysus, see the section above concerning the Greek god.

⁸¹ Livy, xxxix, 9ff.

roles.⁸² Both these gods, though one Greek and one Latin, were connected to the belief that the representation of the phallus is intrinsically linked with the spread of vegetation and fertility.⁸³ *Liber Pater*, at first a god symbolizing germination, *emissor seminum*, popular with the peasants originally, whose rites were conducted in crossroads, was represented by a phallus. His name, according to Saint Augustine, derives from *liberamentum seminum*.⁸⁴ Augustine tells in detail about the rustic ceremonies devoted to Liber in which “a replica of this shameful organ was placed with much pomp on a chariot and taken through the countryside, from crossing to crossing, to the city itself...everyone used the most obscene language...the phallus was carried in solemn procession across the Forum and put in its sanctuary.”⁸⁵ The sexually explicit language, also commented on by Vergil recounting the dirty jokes told during the *Liberalia*, seems to have “possessed magic powers capable of stimulating nature’s forces and helping the consummation of the mysterious processes of the vegetable world.”⁸⁶ Augustine goes on to tell how a matron of a well-respected household would then wreath the phallus, calling on Liber’s aid for successful farming and fertility, and more importantly Liber’s role of warding off the evil eye from fields, much as Hermes and Dionysus had done in the Greek world. Augustine also relates how Varro mentions the rites of Liber “celebrated...so immodestly and licentiously that the male genitals were worshipped in honour of the god...not with any modest secrecy but with open and exulting depravity.”⁸⁷

The Liber worshipped at crossroads and connected to the phallus resembles the indigenous Italian god, Mutinus Titinus, first mentioned by the Latin satirist Lucilius in the later

⁸² Grimal, Pieree. Love in Ancient Rome. New York: Crown Publishers, 1967. 30. Augustine(from Varro) CD 6.9 7.2-3, 7.16, 7.19

⁸³ Bruhl, 26.

⁸⁴ CD, 6.9, 7.2-3, 7.16, 7.19; Palmer, 191.

⁸⁵ CD 7.21; Grimal, 29.

⁸⁶ Grimal, 30.

⁸⁷ CD vii.21

second century B.C.⁸⁸, but believed to have existed since the founding of Rome by Festus' lexicon. Though little is known of, Mutinus Titinus, there was a shrine to this phallic god on the Velian Hill, comprised of many altars, and another, rural shrine twenty-six miles from Rome; he existed into Augustan times, surviving afterwards in "a more acceptable guise."⁸⁹ Robert Palmer suggests that in the time of Augustus, with the reconstructions on the Velia and Via Sacra beginning in 36 B.C., the cult of Mutinus Titinus was moved to the Via Sacra from an alleyway just off the Forum and was "installed in a circular tabernacle in the company of the 'Trojan' Magna Mater," a goddess whom Augustine links to Liber and Priapus, "who is Mutinus Titinus."⁹⁰

The importance of Mutinus Titinus is shown by the location of his shrine among the important monuments of the Roman Forum. During the reign of Augustus, Cn. Domitius Calvinus built baths, expanding his territory, removing the shrine and altars of Mutinus Titinus.⁹¹ Or perhaps, once the shrine to Mutinus Titinus was seized, the god was relocated or transformed, worship was transferred to the other phallic Italian god, Liber, and the "spirit of the god lived on in Bacchic guise."⁹²

But even though the cult of Priapus is thought to have been imported with the Bacchanalia at the beginning of the second century B.C.⁹³, it is not this phallic god who replaced "archaic" Mutinus Titinus but rather Liber.⁹⁴ Scholars investigating this god have speculated that the shrine on the Velia was actually a cult site of a double god, Mutinus and Titinus separately.

⁸⁸ Book 2 of his satires: *nam quid moestino subrectoque huic opus signo?/ ut lurcaretur lardum et carnaria fartim/conficeret?*

⁸⁹ Palmer, 187.

⁹⁰ Palmer, 199, 198.

⁹¹ Palmer, 199.

⁹² Palmer, 200.

⁹³ The earliest surviving Latin reference to Priapus is from a fragment of the comic writer Afranius (circa 150 B.C): "what people say about me, that I was born of a long-eared parent [an ass], simply isn't true" (Parker, 11).

⁹⁴ Fantham, Elaine. "Sexual Comedy in Ovid's Fasti: Sources and Motivation." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 87 (1983), 185-216. 189.

Augustine in his fifth-century *City of God* suggests the presence of two different gods, stating that there is another Jupiter, “Mutunus or Tutunus who is Priapus among the Greeks.”⁹⁵ In Tertulian’s writings from the second and third century A.D., Mutinus and Titinus are separate, “double and obscene.”⁹⁶

But Mutinus Titinus appears as a single god, an opinion that seems confirmed by later authors and authorities, on a coin from 88 B.C., minted by Q. Titius,⁹⁷ the man whose name is the derivation of the phallic god’s (Figure 19). The god depicted on this coin, identified by some as Bacchus, by others as Priapus, and by Roman numismatists as Mutinus Titinus, further links these three gods by their phallic characteristics. If Mutinus Titinus can be connected to Jupiter, and *mutinus* and *titinus* are both adjectives thought to be epithets of Jupiter, then Mutinus Titinus’ connection to Liber Pater, “considered another phenomenon of Jupiter,” becomes even more apparent.⁹⁸ Augustine, drawing from Varro’s first century B.C. writing, repeatedly uses these links to and associations with Jupiter to connect and conflate Liber with Mutinus Titinus and even with Priapus.⁹⁹ The location of Liber’s shrine, by the Forum, even parallels that of Mutinus Titinus’ right above the Forum. But unlike the fairly private cult of Mutinus Titinus, the cult of Liber consisted of an overt, public display and wreathing procession, a display that can perhaps be “adduced to illustrate the character of the Roman public cult of Mutinus Titinus.”¹⁰⁰

Mutinus Titinus was worshipped as a fertility and phallic god. Lactantius, writing in the 3rd century A.D., labels Tutinus as the god before whom brides sit as an introduction for the marriage rights.¹⁰¹ The cult of Mutinus Titinus could take many forms: a domestic cult linked to

⁹⁵ CD 4.11: *ipse sit Mutunus vel Tutunus, qui est apud Graecos Pripos*. Palmer, 189.

⁹⁶ Palmer, 189.

⁹⁷ Palmer, 190. See Figure 3

⁹⁸ Palmer, 191.

⁹⁹ CD 4.11, 6.9, 7.24

¹⁰⁰ Palmer 191.

¹⁰¹ DI 1.20.30

a wedding; public worship by women at altars on the Velia; a “remodeled” cult of Liber-Bacchus on the Via Sacra; and the rural cult near Veii, twenty-six miles from Rome.¹⁰² The god was not only worshipped by women but also by the Vestal Virgins, a sacred group that honored the *fascinus* in their shrine, located near the very shrine of Mutinus Titinus¹⁰³. Their worship of this phallic fertility god seems appropriate to their “care to agricultural fertility.”¹⁰⁴ Not only his attributes but the actual derivation of his name has a phallic association and reference. The god’s first name, Mutinus, is related to *mutto* or *mutunium*, genital designations, a word that “must once have been in general or vulgar use.”¹⁰⁵ Both Horace¹⁰⁶ and Lucilius¹⁰⁷ personify *mutto*. From this word the derivative *mutonium* or *mutuniatus* appears in Pompeian graffiti, in Martial and in the *Priapea*. The god’s second name, Titinus, has “been brought into connection with an italic cult of fertility by function of the phallus.”¹⁰⁸ In a satire of Persius,¹⁰⁹ *titus* is used in reference to “dove,” a bird of extraordinary fertility, a euphemism for “penis.” Robert Palmer concluded that the god’s “first name reflected his phallic nature; the second, the auspicious bird *titus*.”¹¹⁰

The Roman use of the phallus can be traced to earlier cultures not only archaeologically but also philologically. The many terms for the phallus in Latin can be seen to have their origins in Greek. Unfortunately, the Etruscan sexual vocabulary remains unknown. In Greek, as in Latin, the phallus could be referred to by euphemisms, medical terminology and literal meanings. With

¹⁰² Palmer, 205.

¹⁰³ Palmer, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, 272 note 42.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, J.N. *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*. London: Duckworth, 1982. 63. See chapter 4 of this paper for a further account of this phallic euphemism

¹⁰⁶ *Serm.* 1.2.68

¹⁰⁷ 307.

¹⁰⁸ Palmer, 191.

¹⁰⁹ *Satie* 1.19-21

¹¹⁰ 205.

the exception of the Greek φαλλός¹¹¹ and χελιδών¹¹² (the English “*penis*” and “*swallow*” (“*vagina*”), the Latin “*phallus*”¹¹³ and “*chelidon*”), Latin sexual vocabulary did not include loan Greek sexual words. Certain Greek euphemistic sexual terms (*machaera*, *pyramis*, *thyrsus*, *clinopale*, *palaestra*) were first adopted by the Latins as words without a sexual sense, later gaining a euphemistic, sexual connotation.¹¹⁴ The Latin *mentula* (*prick* or *dick*), most common in poetry, can find its equivalent in the Greek πέος¹¹⁵ (literally *penis*). In Greek there are also different words to connote different states of the phallus: the average, conventional-sized organ, σάθη,¹¹⁶ the phallus ready for intercourse, φωλή,¹¹⁷ the vulgar term for an erect phallus, στύω,¹¹⁸ the limp phallus, ἀσύωτατος,¹¹⁹ the proper term for an erect phallus, ὀρθός.¹²⁰

There are obvious correspondences between Greek euphemisms for the phallus and those in Latin. In Greek, the phallus could take on the symbolism of many different objects or themes, “creating secondary figures, comparisons, and images that color and refract the perceptions and emotions evoked directly by primary obscenities...the value of metaphorical obscenity lies precisely in its flexibility and nuance.”¹²¹ For example, the phallus could be depicted as a weapon, something that pierces, κέντρον,¹²² κῆλον,¹²³ ξίφος,¹²⁴ μάχαιρα,¹²⁵ δόρυ;¹²⁶ or a

¹¹¹ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 243, 261, 263, 271, 276; Hdt., 2.48

¹¹² Aristophanes, *Lys.* 770.

¹¹³ See *CIL* IV. 10085 “phallus durus Cr(escentis), vastus,” an inscription from Pompeii where the word is used to refer to the human penis. Adams, page 64, states that “it would not have been domiciled in any variety of Latin. The Pompeian example, if it has been read correctly, must be an isolated transfer.”

¹¹⁴ Adams, 228-229.

¹¹⁵ Athenaeus 10.451b, Aristophanes *Ach.* 1060, 1066, 1216, *Lys.* 124, 134, 415, 928 *Wasps*, 739, 1347 Antipater, A.P. 11.224.1, Strato, 12.240.2

¹¹⁶ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 1119; Archil. 43

¹¹⁷ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 143, 979; Aristophanes, *Birds*, 507, 560; Aristophanes, *Knights*, 964

¹¹⁸ Aristophanes *Ach.* 1220, *Peace*, 728, *Birds*, 557, 1256, *Lys.* 214, 598, *Thesm.* 157

¹¹⁹ Xenarch. 1.2

¹²⁰ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 725, 916 (in names as puns). *Ach.* 243, 259; Henderson, Jeffrey. *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. 112.

¹²¹ Henderson, 41.

¹²² Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 225, 408, 1115, 1121

¹²³ Archil. 43.3

plant or vegetation, symbolism linked to Dionysus and his role as a rustic, fertility god, *μύκης*,¹²⁷ *συκῆ*,¹²⁸ *βάλανος*,¹²⁹ *κριθή*,¹³⁰ *φηγός*,¹³¹ *ἐρέβινθος*,¹³² or as another body part, *δάκτυλος*,¹³³ *δέρμα*,¹³⁴ *νεῦρον*,¹³⁵ or in a general sense, *πρᾶγμα*,¹³⁶ or *σχῆμα*,¹³⁷ in a synecdoche, *πόσθη*,¹³⁸ a word with an “affectionate and somewhat respectable tone,”¹³⁹ as a red object, *ἐρυθρός*,¹⁴⁰ a color portraying both lust and the genitalia itself,¹⁴¹ as a tail, *οὐρά*,¹⁴² *ὄρρος*,¹⁴³ or *κέρκος*,¹⁴⁴ as an animal, *ἵππος*,¹⁴⁵ *κριός*,¹⁴⁶ *κύων*,¹⁴⁷ *στρουθίας*,¹⁴⁸ *ταῦρος*,¹⁴⁹ *ὄφις*.¹⁵⁰ These general euphemisms are borrowed in the Latin sexual vocabulary, thereby avoiding the direct loans of explicit Greek sexual words.

The standard, expected euphemisms for the phallus, the substitutions and associations of the Greek vocabulary, are actually fairly common over time, from culture to culture. An

¹²⁴ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 156, 632

¹²⁵ Ach. Tat. 2.23

¹²⁶ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 985

¹²⁷ Archilochus 252

¹²⁸ Aristophanes, *Ecc.* 708

¹²⁹ Gal. 10.381, Poll. 2.171, Marc. Emp. 33.67, Celsus (6.18.4, 7.25.1A, 7.25.2)

¹³⁰ Aristophanes, *Pax* 965, *Birds*, 506, 565

¹³¹ Aristophanes, *Pax*, 1137

¹³² Aristophanes, *Ach.* 801

¹³³ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 365, *Eq.* 1168

¹³⁴ Aristophanes, *Eq.* 29

¹³⁵ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 1078; Plat.com.frg. 173.19

¹³⁶ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 23, 26, 661, 994, *Clouds*, 196, *Thesm.* 581, *Ecc.* 1089; Adaeus, A.P. 10.20.1, *πρᾶγμα* is suggestive here of homosexual intercourse.

¹³⁷ Aristophanes, *Ecc.* 482; Lucillius, A.P. 11.139.4

¹³⁸ Aristophanes, *Pax*, 1300, *Thesm.* 254, 515, 1188 *Clouds*, 1014, 1018

¹³⁹ Henderson, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 537-539. Horace, *Serm.* 1.8.5 uses the Latin *rubber* as a pun on the phallus.

¹⁴¹ Rosen, Ralph. “Hipponax, Boupalos, and the Conventions of the Psogos 36.” *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol 118 (1988). pp.29-41. 36.

¹⁴² Soph. frg. 1078; Antiph. 129.4

¹⁴³ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 964

¹⁴⁴ Aristophanes *Thesm.* 239, Herodotus 5.45

¹⁴⁵ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 191

¹⁴⁶ Sophil.8, Aristophanes, *Lys.* 309

¹⁴⁷ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 158, Argentarius, A.P. 5.105.4, Strato, 12.225.2, Poll. 2.176

¹⁴⁸ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 723

¹⁴⁹ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 81, 217

¹⁵⁰ Aristophanes, *Ecc.* 908, *Lys.* 759; A.P. 11.22.2

interesting exception to the expected phallic images or symbols is the Greek custom of equating sexual parts with food, a link common in Old Greek Comedy.¹⁵¹ The association between the phallus and consumed food can not only be seen in literature but also in religious festivals in the Greek world. At the Attic festival of Haloa in December, a ritual ensuring successful growth of seeds, participants, possibly involved in orgiastic activities, consumed phallic-shaped food at banquets.¹⁵² There are many Greek words for food that serve as euphemisms for the phallus, not cooked and consumed, but “static comparisons,” “all emphasizing the erect, fleshy appendage:” κρέας,¹⁵³ κωλῆ,¹⁵⁴ ὄφον¹⁵⁵ (Henderson, 47). The connection between gluttony and genitalia could be tied to excessive display or fulfillment of wanton desires. In Latin, the verb to eat even takes on a slang sexual meaning; “to eat the *verpa*,” a common euphemism for the phallus, connotes fellatio.¹⁵⁶ The stroking of a sausage in Hipponax’s seventh-century poetry, the euphemistic image of food as an implied phallic object, might find its later parallel in Juvenal’s phallic wine glass¹⁵⁷ or Petronius’ phallic pastries¹⁵⁸ (the Greek ὀλισβοκόλλιξ¹⁵⁹), confirmations of the earlier Greek implied link between food and the phallus.

¹⁵¹ Rosen, 39. See Artem. 5.62 for an example of πέος eating where a dream is reported in which a man fed his penis with bread and cheese as if it were an animal.

¹⁵² Johns, 43. Berlin F2275, a red figure sherd depicts a girl holding a container of eyed phalli which may have been inspired by the festival of Haloa. A red-figured, 5th century cup from the Villa Giulia in Rome depicts a hetairai dancing around a large model phallus, an illustration that seems to be connected to such a festival as the Haloa (Figure 20). A red-figure vase by the Hasselmann Painter (London BM, E810) shows a woman sprinkling phalli standing erect from the ground, a depiction whose context is likely a fertility festival (Figure 21).

¹⁵³ Aristophanes, *Eq.* 428, Fr. 130.3

¹⁵⁴ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 52, 989, 1018, *Lys.* 2

¹⁵⁵ Alex. 49.1; Henderson, 47.

¹⁵⁶ Adams, 139.

¹⁵⁷ 2.95: “Another drinks from a phallic wine glass, the billowing mass of his hair confined in a golden hairnet.”

¹⁵⁸ 60.4 : “Then looking again at the table, I saw that a tray of cakes had been placed on it, with a figure of Priapus, the handiwork of the pastry-cook, standing in the middle, represented in the conventional way as carrying in his capacious bosom grapes and all sorts of fruits.”

¹⁵⁹ Aristophanes, Fr. 1.13; CA 10994

Chapter 2

Priapus: Origins, Cult and Roles

Priape...fascino gravis tento... poeta noster
(Priapea 79)

The Roman Priapus, a god developing out of both the Greek and native Italian phallic fertility gods and the apotropaic, semi-religious symbolism of the phallus, and embodying many of the characteristics of divinities in these two cultures, can be seen as the culmination of the evolution of phallic gods and their images in the Mediterranean. Priapus, in his Roman form, not a native Italian but from the Phocaeen Greek colony of Lampsacus and its surrounding area on the Hellespont, is a synthesis of different cultures, different influences, a blend of roles, ideals, symbols and images adapted to first-century A.D. Roman beliefs and customs.

The evidence for the early worship of Priapus, his origin, and the spread of his cult remain vague before the third and second centuries B.C. What does seem clear, however, is that some form of worship for this ithyphallic god and his apotropaic symbolism derived from the Troad, with the earliest mention of Priapus occurring a little before the fifth century B.C.¹ From this time period, ithyphallic herms that may represent Priapus² have been discovered at Olynthos, a city of Chalcidice. In this area of Asia Minor, there was even a city called Priapos, preserving a cult of the ithyphallic god.³ Strabo, in Book VIII.i.12 of his *Geographies*, describes the maritime town of Priapos,⁴ a town that may have been founded by the Milesians at the same time as they colonized Abydos and Prokonnesos, or by the people residing in near-by Kyzikos.

¹ O'Connor, Eugene Michael. *Symbolum Salacitatis: A Study of the God Priapus as a Literary Character*. Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989. 16. As Strabo states (VIII.i.12) "Hesiod knows nothing of" Priapus.

² O'Connor, 18, states that it is more likely though that these herms actually represented Dionysus.

³ Pliny in NH 5.38 mentions the town of Priapos

⁴ Modern day Priapos remains un-excavated. The modern city is characterized by many medieval towers and walls of defense. In 1190 A.D., it was described as a "city of Hellespontine Latins" (mentioned by the chroniclers of Barbarossa's march). It was one of the last Greek strongholds in Asia to fall in the Byzantine era (Leaf, Walter. *Strabo: On the Troad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923, 74-75)

The ancient city was a fairly unimportant site, never gaining the prosperity of the neighboring city of Parion to the west and muted by the predominance of the powerful, near-by city of Kyzikos to the east.⁵ Interestingly, the setting of this city can be seen to echo many of Priapus' later Roman roles: the town's richness of the vines look to Priapus' placement in gardens; the town's importance as a harbor and its connection to maritime activities mirror the god's supervision over the sea and voyages; its location, exposed to winds from the north-east,⁶ making it not a very safe harbor, perhaps reflects the need for Priapus to protect it.

Despite the assignment of his name to the town, Priapus was not originally from Priapos. In many later written accounts, Lampsakos is labeled as his home,⁷ a place whose original name, according to a myth reported by the grammarian Sophokles,⁸ was Aparnis; *because* it was in this town that Aphrodite disowned (ἀπαρνῆσατο) Priapus, disgusted at his grotesque, enormous genitalia. In Priapos itself, Strabo hypothesizes that the cult of this ithyphallic divinity may have arisen from “a general impulse to worship the god” or have traveled to this city from Orneai, near Corinth.⁹

The spread of Priapus' cult from the Troad remains equally uncertain. Later in the fifth century, Priapus may have become known in certain Greek colonies, where his depiction was syncretized with that of other Greek and eastern gods, especially that of Dionysus or satyrs.¹⁰ For

⁵ Leaf, 74-75. Also, there is no evidence of coinage of Priapos until the second century B.C. Its lack of importance can also be seen in Attic tribute lists which attest that Parion would have to contribute one talent, Kyzikos nine and Priapos only a mere five-hundred drachmas.

⁶ Leaf, 73

⁷ Paus. 9.31.1 “By his side is an ox, and an image of Priapus worth seeing. This god is worshipped where goats and sheep pasture or there are swarms of bees; but by the people of Lampsacus he is more revered than any other god, being called by them a son of Dionysus and Aphrodite.”

⁸ In his commentary on Apollonios

⁹ Leaf, 76, states that the idea that the cult was introduced from Orneai is “not to be believed...it never had any hold on the mainland of Greece.”

¹⁰ O'Connor, 16. Athenaeus 1.30 B: “Among the people of Lampsacus, Priapus who is the same as Dionysus, is held in honor and has the by-name Dionysus as well as Thriambus and Dithyrambus.” He is also conflated with Dionysus on a second-century B.C coin from Lampsakos; Agnes Baldwin, “Lampsakos. The Gold Starters, Silver

the cult of Priapus is very similar to the Thracian worship of Dionysus and it is thought that the worship may have come from Thrace with the Phrygians.¹¹ And the popularity of Priapus most likely spread to Bithynia where he was called Πρίεπος¹² and his cult could also likely be found along the coast from the Granikos to Lampsakos.¹³

Priapus' presence in the Greek world is concretely documented as early as the third century B.C. in an inscription from Thera declaring "I, Priapus, came to this city of Thera from Lampsacus, and brought enduring prosperity. I came to aid and succour you all, both citizens and strangers."¹⁴ At this same period, Theokritos and his contemporary Euphronios, an Alexandrian poet and grammarian, attest to the cult of Priapus.¹⁵ Other contemporary literary evidence confirms the existence of Priapic worship in Greece. For there was also a group of Greek poems to Priapus, a Greek *Priapea*, whose composition dated from the third century B.C. until the sixth century A.D.¹⁶ And from his earliest appearance, Priapus was not only written about conceptually but also accorded a physical part in ritual processions, accompanying statues of Alexander or Ptolemy.¹⁷

Despite the existence of the Priapic cult in the Troad during the Archaic period, some scholars hypothesize that the cult of Priapus could not have flourished until after the first century A.D, a time when Liber was still the popular, worshipped phallic god. Most scholars, however, support the literary evidence of the third century B.C and believe that the cult traveled to the

and Bronze Coinages," *AJN* 53 (1924), 73-74. Ivy, a plant that had an apotropaic quality itself, also linked Priapus and Dionysus (Herter, H. *De Priapo*. Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1932. 285).

¹¹ Leaf, 75

¹² Eust. on *Il.* VII.459: παρὰ Ἀρριανῶι ἐν Βιθυνιακοῖς, παρ' ᾧ καὶ ἐς Ἡλίου ἀλληγορεῖται ὁ Πρίεπος διὰ τὸ γόνιμον

¹³ Leaf, 62

¹⁴ *IG* 12 3 421.

¹⁵ Theokritos i.21. In a rural, rustic setting, the goatherd says: "Come let us sit beneath this elm, facing Priapus and the springs, the shepherds' seat, and the oaks"; Strabo VIII.vi.24

¹⁶ *Priapea: Poems for a Phallic God*. Ed. W.H Parker. London: Croom Helm, 1988. 2.

¹⁷ *Athen.* 5.201D, Herter, 1

western Mediterranean before the time of Alexander the Great.¹⁸ One scholar has investigated Priapus' popularity in Marseille and the widespread influence of his cult at this site.¹⁹ In fact, the Phocaeen colonists, residents of Priapus' homeland, founded Marseille around 600 B.C. In Petronius' *Satyricon*, the protagonist, Encolpius, after offending Priapus in Marseille, is attacked and pursued by the god's wrath.²⁰ Marseille is again linked to Priapus by way of the *Satyricon* in the fifth-century Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris' discussion of Petronius, "*et te Massiliensium per hortos/sacri stipitis, Arbiter, colonum/Hellespontiaco parem Priapo.*"²¹

Priapus' popularity and presence in Marseille are attested to not only in literature but also in archaeological evidence. Although not Priapic in form, a terracotta winged phallic vase in Ionic style from the 6th century B.C. was uncovered in Marseille; a large terracotta phallus from the same archaic time period was also found²² (Figure 22). Perhaps the association of Priapus and Marseille in the *Satyricon* and the archaic terracotta phalli suggest an early presence of the cult of Priapus in the western Mediterranean. However, there remain some questions: if Priapus did exist in so early a period, why do no Priapic votive statues or other images appear until a much later date? Why would Dionysus need to be imported from Greece if a phallic, fertility god already existed?

According to most scholars, the cult of Priapus spread through Italy in the beginning of the second century B.C., after the contact with orientalized Greek culture and possibly imported with the ritual practices of the Bacchanalia, yet escaping the suppression of the cult of Bacchus

¹⁸ Fantham, 189.

¹⁹ Neilson, Harry, R. "A terracotta phallus from Pisa Ship E: more evidence for the Priapus deity as protector of Greek and Roman navigators." *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* (2002) 31.2: 248-253. 252.

²⁰ Neilson, 252. For sections of Petronius' *Satyricon* dealing with Priapus see especially: 60.4 (pastries), 137.6 (goose), 100.4 (in a dream), 133.3 (beg help of the god), 17.8 (shrine of Priapus)

²¹ *Carm.* 23 155-157, fgt. IV qtd. in Sullivan, J.P. *The Satyricon of Petronius: A Literary Study*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1986. 40

²² Neilson, 252. Hermary, Antoine and Antoinette Hesnard, Henri Treziny. *Marseille Grecque: 600-49 av. J.C. La cité phocéenne*. Paris: Editions Errance, 1999. page 62-63. The phallic vases were found in the ruins of the Cathédrale and the large terracotta phallus was found in the place Jules-Verne.

in 186 B.C.²³ But there is some evidence of Priapus in Etruria in the Hellenistic era; Priapus is depicted in the company of the infant Dionysus and Hermes on the case of a bronze mirror said to be from the reign of Tarquin.²⁴ (Figure 20) The earliest surviving Latin reference to Priapus is from a fragment of the works of the comic writer Afranius (circa 150 B.C): “what people say about me, that I was born of a long-eared parent [an ass], simply isn’t true.”²⁵

Priapus has direct connections with each of his phallic predecessors, Greek or Latin--- Dionysus, Hermes, the *fascinus* of the cult of the Vestal Virgins, Liber, Mutinus Titinus. Priapus can be linked to both Dionysus and Hermes, the two Greek, rustic phallic gods whose conspicuous phallic images and associations act as protections from evil and trespassers. Priapus and Dionysus are linked by depictions on Greek coins, by ithyphallic herms representing Dionysus and by various Greek authors.²⁶ Priapus can be connected with Hermes by their common ithyphallic nature, associations with boundaries, roles as guardians of travelers and the dead. The Latin epithet, *felix terminus*, can be applied to both ithyphallic gods, Priapus and Hermes.²⁷ And in the first and second century A.D., herm-like statues of Priapus were depicted on Arretine and Samian pottery, suggesting that at this date, “there may be some conflation between Hermes in this form and Priapus.”²⁸ (Figure 21) Near the ancient Pons Aurelius on the near side of the Tiber in Rome, a herm statue of Priapus has been found.²⁹ (FIGURE 22)

According to some traditions, Dionysus was the father of Priapus;³⁰ in others, Hermes was the

²³ Herter, 25-28.

²⁴ Herter, 127. Found in the British Museum. See Walters, H.B. Catalogue of the Bronzes, Greek, Roman, and Etruscan in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum. London: Order of the Trustees, 1899. number 737. This bronze mirror case depicts Priapus as a bearded man dressed in a short girl chiton, his right hand raised to his mouth.

²⁵ Parker, 11. For Priapus as the son of an ass, see Macrobius, Satire 6.5.6

²⁶ Strabo 13.1.9, Athenaeus, 1 30B; O’Connor 18.

²⁷ Herter, 213.

²⁸ Johns, 52.

²⁹ Herter, 214

³⁰ Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, vol.1 p.374; Strabo VIII.i.12

father.³¹ But whatever his exact parentage, in each legend Priapus is a son to a Greek god whose phallus has apotropaic powers, a lineage which serves to create a bridge between Greek and Roman beliefs, between the symbol of the phallus in one culture and its meaning in another. While Priapus was mostly worshiped as a “rustic god in a rural setting,” he was occasionally worshipped by frenzied women, in secret orgiastic rites, much like those of Dionysus or the Bacchanalia. Juvenal³² states that the maenads of Priapus were excited and thrilled by music, wine and dancing.

The Italian Priapus not only can be traced to the worship of the phallus in Greek culture but also linked to early Italian phallic worship. At the annual Vestalia in June, the feast of the Vestal Virgins, asses, animals sacred to Priapus, were exhibited, decorated with loaves of bread.³³ Priapus, the foreign phallic god, was welcomed and honored by a sacred, indigenous group who notoriously worshipped the phallus, the *fascinus*.

Priapus, the phallic god of fertility in Italy, can be seen to derive his fundamental roles and appearance from the native Liber or Mutinus Titinus. Varro even conflates these three rustic fertility gods; Augustine writes of Mutinus Titinus “who is Priapus among the Greeks.”³⁴ Trajan even re-issued the coin of Quintus from 88 B.C with Mutinus Titinus to depict Priapus.³⁵ Dionysus, Hermes, Liber, Mutinus Titinus and finally Priapus are all in essence rustic fertility gods, gods endowed with giant phalli, gods in whose honor processions or images are created to ensure prosperity, growth and fertility. But each of these gods also takes on the role of a modern-day scarecrow, warding away evil trespassers or bad luck from the crops that he protects. Both Liber and Mutinus Titinus can actually be seen as the transition gods from the Greek Dionysus to

³¹ Hyg. F 130; Luck, Georg. *The Latin Love Elegy*. London: Methuen & Co., 1969. 93.

³² *Satire* 6. 314-317

³³ Palmer, 201. For Priapus and the ass see, Ovid *Fasti* 1.391-440; 6.316-346

³⁴ Palmer, 189; Augustine *CD* 4.11: *ipse (sc. Iuppiter) sit Mutunus vel Titunus, qui est apud Graecos Priapus*.

³⁵ Palmer, 204. See figure 18 for a picture of the coin

the Latin Priapus, bridging the gap both temporally and geographically, representing selective roles or features, personae which make up the many traits and identities of Priapus.

But despite his many different roles, the one constant, prominent, identifying feature of Priapus is his exposed, erect, hyperbolically large phallus, a member which allows the ancients to explore “the phantasmic limits of human sexuality.”³⁶ Although he is a god representing a number of different areas or different disciplines, Priapus had one principal purpose for exhibiting his erect phallus: the protection and safety from evil, for “it is as if the phallus itself were magic, able to exist at the center of the area of the obscene without taint or injury.”³⁷ As the predominant characteristic of Priapus, the phallus, an apotropaic power, becomes inseparable from the god himself, “really nothing but a giant phallus,” a power that wards away the evil eye and protects an area--- “Priapus himself, after all, is a talking, deified phallus.”³⁸ Priapus and his phallus are sacred forces which protect and ensure safety, magical powers, a “witzgott, a trickster mediating obscenity and piety, the base and the sublime.”³⁹

Despite the variety of both his functions and the media on which he is represented, there is a constant motif in the depiction of Priapus: his one-piece garment is always raised up shamelessly to reveal his enormous genitalia; he usually wears a hat or some turban-like, foreign cap;⁴⁰ he is often unkemptly bearded, his facial hair vulgarly recalling his pubic hair, making an “unpleasant connection between mouth and genitalia, an identity that pervades Latin

³⁶ Olender, Maurice. “Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts.” Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World. Ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. 105

³⁷ Richlin, Amy. The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. 67.

³⁸ Kiefer, 116; Richlin Garden, 67.

³⁹ Kragelund, Patrick. “Epicurus, Priapus and the Dreams in Petronius.” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1989), 436-450. 447.

⁴⁰ Brian Rose on page 17 note 50 of “Bilingual Trojan Iconography” in Rose, Charles Brian. “Bilingual Trojan Iconography.” *Mauerschau. Festschrift fuer Manfred Korfmann*. R. Aslan et al., eds. Remshalden, 2002. 329-50, looking at the fresco of Priapus from the House of the Vettii in Pompeii (see figure 23 of this paper) notes that “it was only in the first century A.D. that Priapus began to wear the Phrygian cap, undoubtedly because his principal sanctuary was located at Lampsakos, in the Troad”

invective.”⁴¹ Although this seems to be the standard, expected iconography of Priapus, there are also examples of the god as a clean-shaven, well-kept youth.⁴² Priapus, according to Latin authors, can be made of wood,⁴³ the trunk of an old tree,⁴⁴ useless firewood,⁴⁵ poplar,⁴⁶ oak,⁴⁷ the best cypress,⁴⁸ or even pastry.⁴⁹

Perhaps Priapus’ most widespread role is as guardian and protector of the garden or flocks, a rustic role which casts him as a new Dionysus, a new Hermes, a new Liber, a new Mutinus Titunus. For “every garden had its Priapus, carved from a tree trunk and daubed with bright red paint.”⁵⁰ The garden itself, as a “popular sexual metaphor,” carried with it erotic connotations, making it an appropriate setting for an ithyphallic god.⁵¹ Priapus as the god of the garden is first described in lines of Furius Bibaculus (103 B.C) “If you, by chance, should see my Cato’s lair, its shingles painted with red lead, its garden in Priapus’ watchful care.”⁵² There is even evidence of a statue of this god in the Garden of Maecenas in Rome, a statue whose function was “to preserve the new pleasant garden-like qualities of the spot.”⁵³ In fact, in some respects “the rather genial, inoffensive” aspects of Priapus “may suggest, in a humorous manner, some of the positive values of Maecenas’ circle.”⁵⁴ Garden Priapus and his phallus were neither obscene nor extremely comic, but instead were guardians, important protectors of the crops and

⁴¹ Richlin, *Garden*, 123.

⁴² Herter, 20-21.

⁴³ Vergil, *catalepton* 1a

⁴⁴ Columella, *r.r* 10 29-34

⁴⁵ Horace, *Satire* 1.8

⁴⁶ Vergil, *catalepton* 2a

⁴⁷ Vergil, *catalepton* 3a

⁴⁸ Martial, 6.49, 6.73

⁴⁹ Martial, 17.70

⁵⁰ Grimal, 33.

⁵¹ O’Connor, 21. See Catullus’ Poem 11 for the erotic *topos* of a garden

⁵² Parker, 11-12.

⁵³ Anderson, William S. “The Form, Purpose, and Position of Horace’s Satire I, 8.” *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 4-13. 8

⁵⁴ Anderson, 10-11

animals, representing “symbol[s] of mastery, especially sexual, in the rich setting of his garden.”⁵⁵

The garden was a fitting place for a god like Priapus, a god who could both protect and, in his more humorous role, create an exotic, carnival, festive and playful atmosphere. The statues and reliefs of Priapus make the garden a sacred place, “*le milieu par excellence du thiase et les baignaient dans une atmosphère toute dionysiaque.*”⁵⁶ The Bacchic character of the Roman gardens might derive from both a mystic ritual in the funerary gardens that surround sanctuaries of the Hellenistic Orient and the art of theater of Asia Minor.⁵⁷

Perhaps the role of Priapus as the god of the gardens, with his close connection to the natural vegetation he protects, finds its parallel in literature in the botanical euphemisms for the phallus. Agriculture euphemisms for the genitalia of both sexes, copulation, and sexual actions abound in both Greek and Roman examples.⁵⁸ Latin words from nature such as *beta*, *ramus* or *cicer*, for example, were commonly used by Latin poets to implicitly refer to the phallus.⁵⁹ In both the physical statue in the garden of ithyphallic Priapus and the literary botanical substitutions for the Latin word phallus, the phallus is intrinsically linked to nature, highlighting nature’s regenerative powers. This procreative role explains the occasional reference to Priapus as a god associated with marriage (much like the roles attributed to his predecessors, Liber and Mutinus Titinus and their rituals for the recently-wed). The Latin author Columella, writing in the first century A.D., attests to Priapus’ importance in marriage, promising that Priapus “who

⁵⁵ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 125.

⁵⁶ Bruhl, 146.

⁵⁷ Bruhl, 146-147.

⁵⁸ See chapter 4 for a full discussion of phallic metaphors.

⁵⁹ Adams, 26-28.

brings fruit...will stimulate reluctant husbands to the amorous deed.”⁶⁰ Four hundred years later, Martianus Capella advises those who are wed to honor Priapus before all gods.⁶¹

Priapus, as the guardian of the garden, not only ensures the fertility of the vegetation but also protects his territory from thieves or trespassers. His enormous phallus becomes a symbol of fertility and an actual dangerous weapon: “female thieves will be raped by it, adult thieves will suffer irrumation, and boys will suffer anal rape.”⁶² Priapus’ threatening weapon brings to mind the Latin words for weapons, or sharp, pointed objects that constitute many euphemisms for the phallus in the Latin language.

These dual roles of Priapus, guardian and menace, can apply not only to his role as the god of a garden but also to all his other beneficent and protective roles. Priapus guaranteed both the fertility of natural vegetation and the growth of material, lucrative affluence. He ensured the safety of fields and flocks, the fertility of the land; he was also closely connected with wealth and mercantile prosperity. The Greek Priapus from the Thera inscription clearly announces his promise to bring wealth and prosperity. In the Roman city of Pompeii, in the House of the Vettii, a house of wealthy merchants, Priapus stands as guardian at the *fauces* of the doorway. (Figure 23) In this famous fresco, Priapus and his giant phallus represent three different kinds of prosperity: growth, represented by his enormous phallus; affluence, represented by the bag of coins which he holds and weighs; fertility, symbolized by the basket of fruit at his feet. The combination of money and the large member allows the viewer to link the two, to equate the extensive quantity of each, an association evoked in the juxtaposition of the phallus and the bag of coins on the scale.⁶³

⁶⁰ *r.r* 10 158-159

⁶¹ 7 725 17

⁶² Richlin, *Garden*, 121.

⁶³ Clarke, John. *Roman Sex: 100B.C.- 250A.D.* New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2003. 104.

From the first clear evidence of the worship of Priapus and the spread of his cult in the Mediterranean, in the 3rd or 2nd century B.C, Priapus appeared as a protector deity of mariners, sea-borne traders, and those who “engage in every kind of seamanship.”⁶⁴ Many of the Greek poems devoted to Priapus portray him as the god of harbors, protector of mariners,⁶⁵ a domain which, like the garden, carries with it many sexual metaphors and connotations.⁶⁶ Just as Priapus is a marker in the gardens, establishing boundaries and defining an inviolable territory, so too is he a marker set up on rocks, beaches and harbors, a navigational marking for mariners that was probably just “simple pilings with a minimum of adornment set up to function both as loci for dedication and as navigational devices...combin[ing] a practical with a religious purpose.”⁶⁷ And just as the Greek Herm is thought to have developed from a simple piling of stones into a “sacred and inviolable” boundary marker, representing a god who protected terrestrial boundaries, so too did the Priapic sea markers.⁶⁸ These Priapic sea markers could have served as distance markers, beacons designating a change of course, indicating dangerous waters, signaling a landing place. Priapic sea markers can also be seen to have an apotropaic function---they were sacred divinities who pointed out a safe route.

Priapus not only ensured a safe voyage as a stone marker but also as a tactile talisman, a votive statue on a ship. In the wreck of Plainer A, a Roman merchantman of the early first century A.D. found near Marseille, a wooden figurine very closely resembling Priapus was discovered: the youth lifts up his tunic to reveal an empty socket, which likely once held a large, separately-fashioned phallus, the familiar stance of the god Priapus. (Figure 24) This wooden votive, together with another discovered, wooden toga-clad figure, likely was an icon of an

⁶⁴ Herter, 215; *AP* 10.4, late 1st century B.C

⁶⁵ Parker, 5. *AG* 5.54 describes the activities of lovers in terms of the sea.

⁶⁶ O'Connor, 20: the fish may be a phallic symbol, with their heads representing the *glans penis*

⁶⁷ Neilson, 249.

⁶⁸ Neilson, 249.

onboard shrine; its back, left in an unfinished state, seems to suggest its intended frontward exposure, its placement in a niche, a placement not “unlike the *lararium* in a Roman house.”⁶⁹ The prominent presence of this wooden votive of Priapus, placed in a ship’s shrine, highlights the apotropaic force of the god Priapus himself, and by extension the power of his associated, inseparable phallus.

This apotropaic, protective character of Priapus and the phallus in connection with seafaring can also be seen in two other phallic objects or representations found in Roman shipwrecks. A life-size terracotta uncircumcised phallus was discovered in the wreck of the Roman Pisa Ship E, originating in Gaul, from the first 30 years of the first century A.D (Figure 25). The phallus, fashioned in high-relief, with a flat back, seems to have been attached to a panel in an upward facing position, an erect position much like that of Priapus’ member, implying an active, powerful role.⁷⁰ From a Roman wreck in the Rhine, from the second century A.D., a bronze proembolion (secondary ram) with a phallus embossed on its front face was discovered (Figure 26). The prominent placement of the phallus on the exterior of the proembolion (the secondary ram that acted more as a figurehead) underscores the symbolic protection of the vessel.

The safe passage that the Priapic markers and votive statues afforded sailors parallels the safe voyage that funerary Priapic images provided. Although Priapus is less frequently depicted as a god associated with death, a god illustrated on tombs, a god invoked at funerals, he nonetheless acts fittingly as protector of yet another realm of ancient culture.⁷¹ A funerary inscription found in Verona reveals Priapus’ connection with death, referring to the grave as “a

⁶⁹ Neilson, 251.

⁷⁰ Neilson, 250.

⁷¹ Herter, 231-232.

place reserved for a memorial with a shrine of Priapus.”⁷² This association of Priapus with death can also be seen in an inscription found near a grave in Rome: “I, who with unsheathed member guard this grave, Priapus am, seat of both death and life.”⁷³ Even in Horace’s *Satire* 1.8, Priapus is a watchman over a cemetery.

Depictions of Priapus on actual tombs have also been found. For example, in Aquilia, the Augustan colony north of Venice, a white marble funerary altar, dating from the 1st-3rd century A.D., was discovered depicting the familiar guise of Priapus (Figure 27). A seductive Priapus stands in relief lifting his tunic and revealing a member masked by a cornucopia of fruit and vegetation. Fertility, thus, is granted double importance by both the phallus and the luscious, abundant fruit. Priapus stands on a pedestal against a single tree, a placement reflecting his role as god of the garden and his usual representation as a pillar of wood or construction from an oak or poplar. An aged man is depicted leaning over an altar and reaching towards Priapus’ genital area, as if in an act of supplication or desperation. A youth stands in the background holding a plate, possibly of funerary offerings. The whole scene is raised on a rocky landscape, a setting recalling the rocks and barrenness of many scenes of death and the underworld depicted on other funerary art. While at first it may seem unlikely that Priapus, a deity of life and fertility, is invoked at graves and in funerary illustrations, in actuality his apotropaic, protective role appears as perfectly fitting to the realm of death. Priapus, as a god of graves, funerals and death, can ensure a safe passage to the underworld much as he provided a safe voyage for sailors, can deter the disturbance of the grave, can protect the dead body from evil spirits of the dead, can promise prosperity and good luck in the afterlife.

⁷² *CIL* 5 3634

⁷³ *CIL* 6 3708

In his adaptability, in his many roles as protector and grantor of fertility and prosperity, perhaps Priapus can be seen as an omnigod, a god presiding over all the land, over all the people. Even his name could mean “first principle.”⁷⁴ On a herm-pillar from Tivoli a long, detailed inscription to Priapus survives,⁷⁵ a “genuine worship of this godhead among the people.”⁷⁶ In the inscription, Priapus is hailed as “of all things holy father,” “the holy father of all things that live,” “father, god of everything,” for without Priapus’ “vigor no one can imagine life on earth, in air, in sea.” Priapus is no longer just the god of fertility and reproduction in the garden, in marriage and in the business world and the deity of safe voyages for sailors and the deceased, but is now equally the procreator, the god with a “virile force so famed,” for whom even “Jove will leave alone his awesome thunderbolts...drawn by desire.”

⁷⁴ O'Connor, 16.

⁷⁵ *CIL* 14 3565

⁷⁶ Fischer, Carl. Priapea. Salzburg: Residenz. Verl, 1969. 125.

Chapter 3

The Material Phallus: Apotropaic Power

et sit lusca licet, te tamen illa videt
(Martial 9.37.10)

The apotropaic services that Priapus and his defining phallus provided in general to the whole of Italy can be seen to acquire a more particular, local character in the material examples taken from the ancient cities of the first-century Roman world. The remains of the city of Pompeii, preserved under layers of volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., reflect not only an anthropomorphically expressive conception of the apotropaic function of the phallus (as, for example, represented by the figure of Priapus) but also a sense of community that required the use, on the one hand, of more refined, elaborate images and, on the other hand, of more concrete, iconic forms. The representations of phalli that line the streets and decorate the interiors of the houses in Pompeii present a deliberate, straightforward use of the phallus as a protective, semi-religious force. Their specific placements--- exterior or interior, proximity to crossroads, marking a public or private building, a poor or wealthy residence, ubiquity at entrance ways, appearance on main or side streets---create an organized, precise image of a city reliant on the phallus as a form of divine protection.

This chapter will examine many different material phallic representations, each characterized by its inherent apotropaic function. The chapter begins with an in-depth study of the first-century A.D Roman city of Pompeii, and addresses that city's interior and exterior representations of the phallus. The study then expands its scope in terms of geography and time, investigating *in-situ* phallic representations from Ostia. The final section of this chapter analyzes the material phallic artifacts, both solemn and playful, the religious amulets and the ithyphallic tripods removed from their original loci and now housed in museums.

Pompeii

Interior Decorations

Pompeii, where a very particular, delimited example provides a great number of actual relatively iconic representations of the phallus, also offers more conventionally inspired Priapic, apotropaic images; quite a few memorable examples of Priapus as a phallic god who protects an entrance, a room, a house from the Evil Eye with his large member are evident. In Pompeii, Priapic depictions are most often found in the interior of the house, decorating a room with a highly artistic, detailed, humorous charm. These elaborate illustrations act as complements to the simpler, rough phallic plaques that stand above the doorways and can be seen from the street. Perhaps the direct, basic, bold phallic plaques on the exterior convey a necessary bluntness to avert any evil from entering; a more complicated, detailed, artistic phallic depiction might not be powerful enough to provide that initial protection. The almost comic illustrations of Priapus with his exaggerated phallus that adorn many rooms inside Pompeian houses represent both an enjoyable, comic decoration and, more importantly, a latent protection; the decorated interiors of houses become a stage for the phallus in its apotropaic role.

Class does not seem to have been a determinant in the use of the phallus as a protector: the houses of both the wealthy and the poor, public buildings and private residences, all displayed frescoes of Priapus and his protective, erect, enlarged phallus. Perhaps the most famous Priapic depictions can be found in the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1). A fresco of Priapus weighing his exaggerated phallus (Figure 23) is displayed at the entranceway of this house belonging to wealthy freedmen,¹ initiating a “‘Priapus axis’ that culminates in the statue of the

¹ A. Vettius Restitutus, an *augustalis*, and A. Vettius Conviva

same deity in the peristyle”² (Figure 27). The fresco of Priapus in the unavoidable *fauces* boldly announces the wealth of the Vettii brothers; it infers that the phallus may be worth its weight in gold³ or, possibly, that “money and potency---sexual, social, or political---amount to the same thing.”⁴ The Priapic statue, visible from the entranceway, portrays Priapus in his role as guardian of the gardens; this fountain figure spurts water from his phallus into a basin. The “Priapus axis” that is formed in the house creates both a Dionysiac setting, with Priapus placed in Dionysian company (statues of Dionysus, Ariadne, maenads, Silenus and satyrs), “emphatic---even overburdened---imagery...to surprise and amuse their guests,” while simultaneously protecting the house from the Evil Eye.⁵

Depictions of Pompeian Priapus served not only to protect the houses of wealthy freedmen but also those of the poor, marking the phallus as a universal force against evil. The tiny house at I.13.16, comprised mostly of a garden, while built of the cheapest materials⁶ still included a lavish, seemingly upper-class dining room or “summer triclinium.”⁷ The north wall of this triclinium, the first seen, filled with vivid and detailed erotic decoration in the IV style, created an “impressive display for the entering guest,” illustrations which highlighted the “hierarchies in seating arrangement.”⁸ Despite the poor quality of the house, the detailed iconography recalls that of wealthy residences. Standing to the right of a central, nude Venus, Priapus is portrayed on a large pedestal, his erect phallus “half as long as he is tall”⁹ (Figure 28). This ithyphallic god is depicted in the company of other erotic gods and symbols: Venus,

² Clarke, J. Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art 100B.C-AD250. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 174.

³ Williams. C.A. Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 93

⁴ Skinner, Marilyn, B. Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. 260.

⁵ Clarke, Looking, 177

⁶ wattle and daub, *opus craticum*

⁷ Clarke, Looking 187

⁸ Clarke, Looking, 188, 193

⁹ Clarke, Looking, 188

Dionysus, Hercules, a peacock, a bird pecking at cherries, and a scene of a man and woman copulating on a bed.

But the room is doubly protected by the phallus: Priapus' attached member and the four, red-painted phalli in the extreme upper left corner of the back wall represent a "considerate attempt on the part of the host to bless this dining place with good luck even as they warded off the Evil Eye with a quadruple threat."¹⁰ Three of these four painted, individual, smaller phalli are depicted erect beneath an upper larger, possibly ejaculating phallus¹¹ (Figure 29). The abstract, ejaculating phallus is illustrated again above the counter in the bar at VI.16.33 (Figure 30). Among frescoed ornaments, such as garlands, hippocamps and vegetation, a yellow panel contains a red, ejaculating phallus. Flanking either side of this panel are two tunic-draped men masturbating as they advance towards the male organ. In the triclinium at I.13.16, it seems as though the frame of nude Venus and ithyphallic Priapus, to the far left, against the back wall, and further protected by the four phalli, is exactly the behind principal place at a banquet.¹² This combination of vivid yet simple eroticism and the semi-divine, apotropaic phallus, recalling the "grand[er]" Priapic depictions and sculptures of the wealthy, clearly "presents late Pompeian attitudes toward sexual representation in their simplest and most transparent form."¹³

Priapus joins the company of Dionysus and Venus again in the Complex of Magic Rites at II.1.12, a structure whose original construction dates back to the 3rd-2nd century B.C. Standing directly in the entryway, Priapus is identifiable by his usual attributes: guardian of the garden, he lifts his tunic, its crease holding fruits of the harvest, to reveal his erect phallus (Figure 31). The

¹⁰ Clarke, *Looking*, 193

¹¹ Clarke, *Looking*, 188

¹² Clarke, *Looking*, 191

¹³ Clarke, *Looking*, 187

location of this fresco, protecting a liminal space, very closely parallels that of the Priapus fresco in the *fauces* of the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1).

Priapus, as an apotropaic image, not only protected the interiors of individual private residences but also presided over public, commercial buildings. The relatively tiny Lupanar in Pompeii (VII.12.18-20), comprised of ten rooms, preserves a program of erotic wall paintings. These illustrations, intended for an audience of the lower middle class, the relatively poor and the bottom of social hierarchy, are said to depict the viewers' fantasies of upper-class sexual behavior.¹⁴ Amid the erotic *tabellae*, above the north wall, Priapus stands before a fig tree¹⁵ on a pedestal (similar to the one on which he stands in I.13.16), with two phalli (Figure 32), promising the viewer and client good fortune in sexual experience and possibly even the imagined pleasure of "experiencing orgasm with two penises instead of one."¹⁶ Just like the frescoes of Priapus in the wealthy House of the Vettii and the poorer house at I.13.16, this illustration of the ithyphallic god acts as a protection, ensuring the safety of the space. The Lupanar, a space both of vulnerability and of pleasure, is in need of a protective god, a god to safeguard the clients and prostitutes, and a god to grant good fortune. In fact, this additional phallus can be seen to strengthen Priapus' protective, guardian power, for "if one phallus is apotropaic, two should be doubly effective against the Evil Eye."¹⁷ Interestingly, the double phallus of Priapus can also be seen to add a humorous aspect to the painting, an entertaining characteristic to accompany its apotropaic role. The unexpected, exaggerated double phallus of Priapus, paralleling the cluster of four phalli in the house at I.13.16, can be seen as an extension

¹⁴ Clarke, *Looking*, 199

¹⁵ Carratelli, G. Pugliese, ed. *Pompei. Pitture e Mosaici*. Roma : Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1990. vol. VII, page 524 cites Helbig (H, 505) who suggests that this is a fig tree. For the erotic significance of the fig see Wright, Thomas. *The Worship of the Generative Powers: During the Middle Ages of Western Europe*. Vol. II. New York: Julian Press, 1957, page 69 who states that there was a vulgar gesture of the hand which, at a later period, was called by the Latin word *ficus*, fig.

¹⁶ Clarke, *Looking*, 201

¹⁷ Clarke, *Looking*, 200

of the typical phallic or Priapic iconography such as that found in the House of the Vettii, an elaboration that, according to one scholar, “demonstrates the excessive superstition of the non-elite.”¹⁸

The apotropaic phallus of the interior illustrations is not only anatomically joined to Priapus but can also be seen attached to other figures or in other forms. The potential diversion that accompanies the depictions of Priapus with his exaggerated phallus, a “source of preposterous fun,” is also manifested in the variety of ithyphallic pygmies and bath servants.¹⁹ The apotropaic power that Priapus’ member evoked was augmented by the deliberate humor of the depiction; laughter, according to a widespread belief in the ancient world, was considered an effective method to avert the Evil Eye, for “laughter is itself apotropaic” and “sexual imagery could be a source of mirth, releasing tension and anxiety.”²⁰ The enormity of the phallus itself, “outside the conventional standards of beauty...represent[ing] excess,” may incite laughter, especially when contrasted with the Greek classical ideal of a small penis.²¹ Doro Levi states that “beings with a funny appearance in which some obscene details are accentuated are good *apotropaia*, as well as normal beings represented in indecent attitudes, making vulgar gestures or noises...Laughter is the opposite pole of the anguish produced by the dark forces of evil; where there is laughter, it scatters the shades and the phantasms.”²² And just as Priapus’ two phalli in

¹⁸ Clarke, *Looking*, 200.

¹⁹ Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman*, 259.

²⁰ Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman*, 262

²¹ Clarke, *Roman Sex*, 112. For the ideal of a small penis see Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, which states “if you do these things I tell you, and bend your efforts to them, you will always have a shining breast, a bright skin, big shoulders, a minute tongue, a big rump and a small prick.” (1010-1014). Skinner, 213-214, makes a distinction between the Greek and Roman ideals of a phallus. She claims that “gazing at the slim, athletic youth with modest penis, the classical Athenian felt desire; looking at Priapus, or at his well-endowed neighbor in the steam room, the Roman vicariously thrilled at the paraphernalia of domination” (214).

²² Levi, Doro. “The Evil Eye and the Lucky Hunchback,” in *Antoich-on-the-Orontes*, ed. Richard Stillwell (Princeton 1941), 3, 225

the fresco in the Lupanar both protect and entertain, so too do the mosaics of the ithyphallic or macrophallic “other.”

In the small private baths of the wealthy House of Menander (I.10.4), the House of the Cryptoporticus (I.6.2-4), the House of Caesius Blandus (VII.1.40) and the Praedia of Iulia Felix (II.4.6-7), some of the most explicit representations of the hypersexual black male are found.²³ Each of the black and white mosaics found in these houses of the local elite depicts a heraldic black male swimmer with a giant erection²⁴ or a macrophallic African bath attendant. The ithyphallic black swimmers float around a central “Hellenistic” rosette, are accompanied by dolphins or other fishes and containers, and are framed by a geometric design. The swimmers, appropriate to a location associated with water, seem to evoke a foreign world, reflecting the “late Hellenistic interest in exotic physical types translated into early Augustan terms.”²⁵ John Clarke has hypothesized that, in relation to other examples of heraldic swimmers, dolphins and containers, these scenes depict a section of a narrative, a “composition [that] was comprehensible to the ancient viewer,” an image that “suggest[s] the pleasure of bathing, but also [can be seen] as offering protection to the bathers against any ill-intentioned gaze.”²⁶ The macrophallic, unaccompanied attendants tend to mark the entryway to a caldarium, protecting the bather and warning of the heat with the emphasis on their phalli.

The single figure of the Ethiopian of the Pompeian baths, a type found most notably in the House of Menander (Figure 33), the “other,” remaining outside the Roman “ethnocentric

²³ These mosaics date to the period of the late Second style, 40-20B.C

²⁴ The mosaic artist paid close attention to detail, outlining the phalli of the swimmers in the House of the Cryptoporticus mosaic with ocher-red.

²⁵ Clarke, *Looking*, 141

²⁶ *Looking* 139; Katherine Dunbabin, in “*Baiarum Grata Voluptas*: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths.” *Papers of the British School in Rome* 57 (1989): 6-49, 44.

canon of artistic beauty,” represents the stereotype of a hypersexual black African.²⁷ But despite the different skin color of the African, the owner of the House of Menander clearly “found nothing indecorous in his representation.”²⁸ This large house represents extreme wealth, taking up nearly 2/3 of an *insula*. The bath attendant, an “aestheticized apotropaic image,” stands in the entryway to the caldarium, protecting a liminal space, for in the baths, a place laden with the dangers of *invidia*, where bathers, their clothing removed, are especially vulnerable, it is “necessary to take special precautions” for “external protection may well have been felt more strongly than in normal life.”²⁹ Both his placement and his skin color, his “unbecomingness,” mark him as an apotropaic force--- his “un-Roman body type caus[ing] laughter---all the more so when he had an enormous phallus.”³⁰ While his “otherness,” denoting an “extreme” that provokes laughter, might act as an apotropaic image, it is his giant, accentuated phallus, “isolated...unusually large and comically detailed,” that represents the bath attendant’s main apotropaic power, “effective charms against malice.”³¹ The phallus is further emphasized by the accompanying phallic details in the mosaic: the attendant holds two water pitchers that closely

²⁷ Clarke, *Looking*, 127. Dunbabin, page 42 states that the skin color may be a “realistic touch,” in that it seems as though black slaves were favored to act as bath attendants.

²⁸ Clarke, *Looking*, 129

²⁹ Clarke, *Looking*, 131, 130; Dunbabin, 37. Dunbabin also states that dangerous envy may develop from the beauty of the baths themselves. One remedy against this danger evoked “lay in exalting their good qualities to such a pitch that they are beyond the reach of *phthonos* [the envy which works through the Evil Eye of the envious] which is evidently conceived here as a force powerless to affect what is really superior” (33).

³⁰ Clarke, *Looking*, 131. Another example of an ithyphallic “other” attacking an Evil Eye can be seen in a mosaic from the House of the Evil Eye at Antioch-on-the-Orontes. This mosaic depicts a dwarf whose exaggerated phallus is directed back through his legs at an eye. This eye is not only attacked by the phallus but also by birds, beasts, a trident and a sword. Phalli, protruding from the back of the dwarf’s head, also are directed towards the eye. And directly above the dwarf’s head are the words *kai su*, a common phrase in the aggressive attack against the envious, against the Evil Eye. For a detailed discussion on this depiction and all its apotropaic aspects, see Levi. Dunbabin also lists 5 images of bath attendants found in Africa that have an apotropaic function, four of which are black and macrophallic

³¹ Clarke, *Looking*, 133, 134

resemble the male member; below the attendant, a phallus seems to be depicted in the guise of an ointment jar within the labia of a vagina (in the guise of the strigils).³²

The phallus becomes both entertainment and an implicit *apotropaia* not only when it is attached to comic figures but also when it takes on imaginative, elaborate forms. The ithyphallic black “other” of the bath mosaics can be seen again in a phallic-centered fresco in the Casa dello Scultore at VIII.7.24-22. A festive scene with dancing pygmies along a river bank is depicted on a wall in the outdoor triclinium in a second-style frieze.³³ The two nude pygmies with exaggerated phalli dance along the bank to the music of the double flute; the ejaculating phallus of the pygmy on the left hangs between his legs, pointing towards his back,³⁴ while the phallus of the pygmy on the right points erectly at his mate, ejaculating, while the pygmy simultaneously defecates in the direction of a crocodile at the edge of the illustration (Figure 34). This bizarre depiction exhibits, in an exaggerated, elaborate form, many of the common apotropaic devices of the ancient Romans: the ejaculation recalls the ejaculating phalli of the triclinium at I.13.16; the act of defecation both recalls the early Etruscan example of feces as an *apotropaia* from the Tomb of the Jugglers in Tarquinia (Figure 17),³⁵ a roof tile from Moesia Superior with a horizontal phallus and the inscription “envious ones, whoever shits on this will be buggered,”³⁶ and resembles the first-century Pompeian example pairing the phallus with defecation---a large

³² Clarke, *Roman Sex*, 111

³³ The decoration of this house dates to the early Augustan era or late Republican era. For a discussion on pygmy representations in Pompeii (17 images occur in the houses excavated thus far), see Clarke, John. *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans : Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 315*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Page 191-196

³⁴ There is a relief of Mercury with a huge phallus emerging from his buttocks and rising to his shoulders on a marble block from Durazzo. There is another relief from Delos that depicts a man, facing backwards, with a giant phallus coming from his buttocks.

³⁵ For more on this depiction see Holloway p.448-449 esp. note 14 page 449.

³⁶ Slane, page 489 but first published by Ladek, Premierstein, and Vulic (1901, no. 69, col 151)

stone phallus set into a wall with the inscription underneath “hanc ego cacavi”³⁷ (Figure 35); and of course, the overly exaggerated phallus, like that of Priapus or the bath attendant, wards off evil.

The pygmies on the bank of the river look to the equally ithyphallic black dancers on the bizarre, surprisingly-shaped boat on the river (Figure 36). These nearly nude pygmies, gifted with extremely large, exposed genitalia, move their bodies, dancing to a beat. But the phalli of these dancing pygmies are not alone in their bizarre, apotropaic iconography; their motions seem to correspond to those of the ejaculating boat on which they stand. The stern of the boat is conventional, made of papyrus, with wood and proper mechanisms for rudders; but the prow of the ship is transformed into an ejaculating phallus. It is unclear why the boat and the accompanying ithyphallic and macrophallic pygmies highlight the ejaculating phallus. Perhaps this scene is intended as a diversion to the diners of its triclinium; or perhaps this scene, so concerned with water and traveling, suggests the importance of the phallus as an apotropaic symbol for protection across water (much like the role of Priapus as a guardian of the sea).

The representations of the phallus as a protective, apotropaic symbol seem to take on a decorated, complex, anatomically-integrated role in the interiors of Pompeii. These are not isolated depictions, illustrations in which the power of the phallus is presented as the sole organ, but are more artistic, more harmonious with their surrounding interior decoration, more suggestive of the mood of the room or house. But despite the additional detail, accompanying attributes, or implications drawn from objects,³⁸ the phallus itself remains constant, standing

³⁷ Jeffrey Henderson in *The Maculate Muse* comments on the comic aspect of defecation, stating “in a sense, defecatory jokes and routines are the purest kind of obscene comedy...defecation is indeed one aspect of our lives that must always be hidden (unlike sex), and must always be thought inappropriate...its only comic potential...may be said to involve the tension of pain or discomfort... Scatological humor in comedy is much more restricted to certain lowly types of character than sexual humor, which often appears in noble roles” (187-188).

³⁸ For example, the money bag weighed against Priapus’ phallus in the House of the Vettii; the cluster of four phalli above a consular seat on the triclinium wall of I.13.16.; the double erect phalli of Priapus promising sexual pleasure

apart and separate from the exaggerated, elaborate artistic additions, as the single protective, apotropaic image.

Exterior Representations

This direct individualized power of the phallus can be seen to its full extent in the phallic plaques that line the streets of Pompeii.³⁹ Widespread throughout the city, on the exteriors of public and private establishments, on buildings and roads, the image of the phallus as an apotropaic symbol is inescapable. Within the city of Pompeii, about sixteen phallic plaques remain in-situ, above doorways, ovens, on street pavement, outside gardens. Among these plaques, the phallus can be depicted upright, pointing left or right, solitary, among garden tools, and with enlarged testicles.⁴⁰ But apart from slight variations of representation, the phallus is generally enclosed in a rectangular frame above an entryway, highlighting its semi-divine importance. In fact, this frame almost serves as a temple, housing the phallus in a sacred setting. Interestingly, since most of the phallic plaques simply depict the phallus in its most straightforward, unexaggerated or unembellished state, the decoration is generally found beneath the plaque, with designated rectangular areas directly under a phallic plaque adorned with spiral, tessellated, or rosette designs.⁴¹

in the Lupanar at VII.12.18-20; the excess and amusement of the ithyphallic and macrophallic “other” in both the bath mosaics and the dancing pygmies; or the bizarre form of a boat that an ejaculating phallus may take.

³⁹ Roger Ling in “Street Plaques at Pompeii.” *Architecture and Architectural Sculpture in the Roman Empire*. Ed. Martin Henig. Oxford: Oxford Committee for Archaeology, 1990, gives a catalogue of street plaques in Pompeii including phallic, geometric and figural. To the best of my knowledge, no one has done a comprehensive study of all the *in-situ* phallic representations in Pompeii. See www.sas.upenn.edu/~cmoser

⁴⁰ The testicles are essential for threatening the envious with being buggered. See *Priapea* 15.2-7 in which Priapus has enlarged, mighty testicles that prevent him from being buggered. On a magical amulet in *Cyranides* there is a prescription which makes clear that an erect phallus with testicles is a symbol of virile power (see Slane, page 487 note 23.)

⁴¹ See the phallic plaques from VII.1.36, VI.14.28, or IX.1.14 as examples

The phallic plaques adorn commercial and municipal buildings. Although one might expect different types of phallic representation for each of these very different buildings, the depictions of the phallus can not be categorized according to building type: phalli may face sideways, upwards, downwards, take on imaginative proportions or be painted. The overall randomness in portrayal of the phallus reinforces the idea that these plaques are not meant as demonstrations of wealth, sources of entertainment, reflections of class, but are in fact representatives of the social, religious, cultural beliefs of citizens of Pompeii as a whole.

On the sixteen in-situ plaques, many of the phalli depicted are facing either sideways or upwards. Interestingly, most of the sideways phalli face towards the right within their individual plaques. Perhaps this directional emphasis and repetition, the testicles on the left and the shaft pointing from left to right, reflect the conventional movement from left to right of the type that may be seen in many kinds of figural representation. The phallus does not point in an unnatural, “sinister” direction but its orientation might in fact highlight its beneficent, positive power.⁴² One exception to the rightward-directed, horizontal phallus can be seen on a corner outside a workshop (IX.5.1). The phallus within this framed plaque points to the left. Perhaps this aberration derives from the location of the workshop at a corner, a particularly dangerous spot, as opposed to the mid-street placements of the right-ward phalli.

Regio VII houses most of the extant examples of phallic plaques. These six plaques present variations of the standard phallus. Above the door of a commercial building, the inn at VII.2.32, the framed phallus, flying to the right and unexpectedly winged, is meant to invoke

⁴² This hypothesis takes into consideration artistic conventions that movement from left to right is considered opposite the natural movement.

luck for the shop and its patrons⁴³ (Figure 37). Many theories have been offered about the significance of wings on a phallus;⁴⁴ perhaps those winged organs were considered to have a life of their own and therefore were a “more potent threat than simple, unadorned phalluses.”⁴⁵ The added wings could associate the phallus with specific animals thought to be “well endowed with sexual vigour and general vitality.”⁴⁶ Or perhaps the wings conjure up the Latin slang term for a phallus, *passer*, (sparrow or bird).⁴⁷ Framing the doorway of the bakery at VII.1.36 are two phallic plaques invoking good luck: to the right of the doorway, a simple phallus, made of local materials,⁴⁸ is depicted in a roofed frame (Figure 38); and to the left of the doorway, in a similar frame, Mercury stands with his exaggerated, erect phallus, an organ bigger than his body, with large, hanging testicles reaching to his feet⁴⁹ (Figure 39). This elaborate, playful depiction of Mercury stands apart from customary exterior phallic representations and seems to be more appropriate to the humorous, laughter-invoking phallic illustrations found inside residences. Perhaps this different purpose accounts for the much more straightforward, serious, simple phallus flanking the other side of the doorway; the playful and the serious signifying alternative ways that the phallus acts as an apotropaic force.

Another example of a solitary phallus painted red within a framed box can be seen at VII.3.22-23, outside a shop⁵⁰ (Figure 40) The phallus placed on the exterior of the shop clearly

⁴³ The relief is at least 1.5cm high in a frame of 29x29cm (overall) and 22x 21.5cm (interior). The height of the plaque is 2.58m above the pavement. The phallus plaque is made from Nocera tuff with an outer frame of terracotta. The inner frame has traces of red paint but no traces appear on the field or the relief (Ling)

⁴⁴ See Herter. “Phallos” *PW* (1938), cols 1723-1728 for a discussion on the phallus in its fantastic form.

⁴⁵ Slane, 488.

⁴⁶ Johns, 68.

⁴⁷ In modern Italian as well, the words “bird” or “sparrow” are used as euphemisms or slang terms for the phallus.

⁴⁸ Carved in Nocera tuff with traces of red glaze. The whole frame is 21x 20.5cm and the internal frame is 9x 17 cm. The plaque is 2.33m above the pavement. (Ling)

⁴⁹ A similar portrayal of ithyphallic Mercury can be seen in the *Gabinetto Segreto* in Naples in a fresco depicting the god.

⁵⁰ This plaque is made from Nocera tuff in a simple frame of terracotta. The relief and the frame were painted purple. Overall the plaque measures 20x27cm, with the internal section measuring 14x21cm. The plaque is about 2.28m from the pavement (Ling)

appeals for good fortune for the business and power to the *taberna*.⁵¹ And again, between two shops, at VII.4.26-27, a red phallus is depicted with a vertical orientation lacking a frame⁵² (Figure 41). A very interesting phallic plaque on a garden wall nowhere near a doorway outside Casa del Marianaio (VII.15.2) places the phallus among construction tools in an illustration (Figure 42).⁵³ Amid a plummet, a chisel, and other such tools for measuring and construction, a horizontal phallus is carved in a low relief. This plaque not only presents an interesting grouping of the phallus with tools but also is distinguished by its superimposed inscription of *Diogenes structor*. The signature on the plaque may refer to the supervisor of the construction who has given the final restoration of this building.⁵⁴ Perhaps the apotropaic phallus is meant as a protection of the garden whose wall it adorns or perhaps it should be seen as a protection of the builder, the owner whose inscription is directly above the phallus. A different exterior phallic symbol can be found outside the *cella meretricia* of a little hotel at VII.11.12 (Figure 43). The terracotta phallus is presented like a statue, emanating three-dimensionally from the wall, signaling protection and good fortune. A variant on the phallic plaque as a source of protection can be found in the phallus carved into a block of the hard black basalt on Pompeii's Decumanus Maximus, Via Abbondonza (Regio VII, *insula* 13)⁵⁵ (Figure 44)

Many phallic plaques also remain in-situ in Regio IX. The four in-situ plaques are very similar in their range of iconography to those of Regio VII. Just like the phallus placed among construction tools, a plaque with a phallus and garden tools (a hammer, a float, pliers) can be

⁵¹ As with many storefronts in Pompeii, this shop had a connecting residence and bedroom upstairs

⁵² This relief is made from Nocera tuff. There are hints of burning and thus the plaque may have been re-used. The overall dimensions are 31x26cm and the relief is at least 1.5cm high. The plaque is placed 2.12m above the pavement (Ling)

⁵³ Plaque now in Pompeii, Antiquarium (inv. 2254). Plaque made of Nocera tuff. 34.5x63.5cm (Ling)

⁵⁴ Carratelli, vol. VII, p.765, qtding Fiorelli p.50

⁵⁵ Some people have conjectured that the angle of the phallus points towards the brothel at VII.12.18-20 or that it could point to the entryway. It remains unclear as to the intention, if any, of the direction of the carved phallus.

seen at IX.1.5 outside the office of L.Livius Firumus where one might find stamps or seals⁵⁶ (Figure 45). The upright phallus is prominently placed in the center of this depiction, stressing its importance among the other tools. On the same street of shops, between two adjoining workshops which fronted a joint residence (Casa della Fontana d'Amore) at the back (IX.2.6-7), an upright, single phallus is depicted in a rectangular frame⁵⁷ (Figure 46). Further down the same street (IX.1.14), another upright phallus in a rectangular plaque adorns the wall directly below the lintel of the doorway of a narrow shop (Figure 47).⁵⁸ And at a crossroads, a corner, on a commercial building, a public bottega (IX.5.1), directly next to the atrium of a house (Casa di Achille), a red phallus in a red frame points unconventionally to the left⁵⁹ (Figure 48). A three-dimensional terracotta phallus emanating from a wall, like the one found above the *cella meretricia* at VII.11.12, no longer in-situ but in the *Gabinetto Segreto* in Naples,⁶⁰ also has its origin in Regio IX (Figure 49). In an alley east of *insula* 5 and 6, a stone phallus, with traces of red paint still adhering to it, is interestingly paired with a marble plaque beneath it announcing *hanc ego cacavi* (I shat on this one) (Figure 35). This bizarre connection between the good luck of the phallus and excrement seems to make more sense if considered alongside the other examples of the act of defecation as a type of *apotropaia*.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Plaque made of Nocera tuff with frame of terracotta. Background painted white with objects painted red. Overall: 39.5x35cm, internal dimensions: 32.5x 28cm. The relief is approx. 1.5cm high. The height of the plaque is 2.29m above the pavement (Ling)

⁵⁷ Plaque made of Nocera tuff in a frame of terracotta with no sign of color. Overall dimensions: 38x 31.5cm, internal dimensions: 32x23.5cm. The relief is at least 1.5cm high. It is 1.85m high above pavement (Ling)

⁵⁸ Made of Nocera tuff in a terracotta frame. The side and bottom of the frame were painted red as well as the background and relief. The upper frame was painted yellow. The background may originally have been over-painted blue (Ling, 54). It is 23.5x21cm, internal: 17x14cm. The relief is 2.5cm high. The plaque is 2.5m above the pavement.

⁵⁹ Made of Nocera tuff in an elaborately-profiled terracotta frame. Overall dimensions: 34x47.5cm, internal dimensions: 20x35cm. The relief is approx. 1.5cm high. The plaque is 2.96m above the pavement,

⁶⁰ The *Gabinetto Segreto*, just recently opened in 2000, in the Naples Museum of Archaeology, houses many 'obscene' objects from Pompeii, Herculaneum and other areas of the Italy.

⁶¹ For example, the man defecating in the Tomb of the Jugglers in Tarquinia or the marcophallic, ejaculating pygmies also defecating in the Casa del Scultore at VIII.7.24.22. Slane, 494 note74, relates that according to an

A synthesis of the terracotta phallic plaque and the frescoed phallus can be seen on the painted façade of the *officina infectoria* (dyeworks with furnace) (IX.7.1-2) (Figure 50). Just as it is in the house at I.13.16 and II.1.12, this phallus is associated with Venus and Dionysus.⁶² On the right side of the façade, over the cauldron, a winged phallus is depicted in yellow paint. A larger phallus in relief decorates the side of the cauldron pointing towards the street. The elaborate painted phallus with its spiked wings, housed in a small stucco temple whose roof has akroteria and decoration in its pediment, ensures the security of a fruitful and lucrative business. This artistic treatment of this phallus both recalls the interior phallic decoration in the triclinium at I.13.16 in its ornamentation and, in its framed temple, corresponds to the framed, phallic terracotta exterior plaques.

The final six in-situ phallic plaques can be found in Regio I, III and Regio VI. Outside a garden wall, on the northwest corner, a phallus of limestone with traces of red remains as a protection of the garden within and against the dangers of the crossroads which it governs (I.20.5) (Figure 51). Of a similar rough construction, on the façade of a house at VI.5.16, a large vertical phallus, with traces of red paint, is depicted in strong relief⁶³ (Figure 52). Another vertical red phallus is found, here housed in tall shrine-like frame, on a wall between two shops

ancient topos, the ultimate humiliation envy inflicts can take the form of turning the statues of a great man into a chamber pot (Strabo 9.1.20, Diogenes Laertius 5.77, Juvenal 10.56-64).

⁶² The supposed parents of Priapus in some legends, see chapter one.

⁶³ This relief is made of yellow tuff in a frame of terracotta. There are traces of red on the frame as well. The overall dimensions are 36.5x17cm, the internal dimensions are 31.5x10cm. The relief is up to 6cm high. The plaque is 3.62m above the pavement (Ling).

at VI. *Insula Occidentalis*.3-4⁶⁴ (Figure 53). Similarly, at VI.2.24-25 between two houses, another vertical phallus is placed within a tall, narrow shrine (Figure 54).⁶⁵

Of a more elaborate, anthropomorphized form, at the southeast corner of III.4, a phallus-headed (and possibly tailed) bird appears below a rosette in profile facing right (Figure 55).⁶⁶ This depiction recalls the popular portrayal of the phallus bird as seen in phallic depictions of Dionysus at Delos,⁶⁷ a depiction which plays with the usual, more straightforward exterior illustrations of the phallus in Pompeii. The conservative, solitary phallus is again altered outside an inn for games, the *taberna lusoria*, on Via di Stabia, where an appropriately playful phallic plaque in the shape of a temple is found (VI.14.28).⁶⁸ Symbolizing good fortune, two pairs of phalli flank a cup for the game of dice (Figure 56). The phalli are exaggeratedly bent to mirror the shape of the central cup. Another phallic plaque, removed to the *Gabinetto Segreto*, is from Regio VI. Found above the oven in the bakery of Casa di Pansa (VI.6.18), the phallic plaque with the engraved “*hic habitat felicitas*” promised good fortune, power and fertility, all gifts associated with the phallic charm (Figure 57).

The very specific placement of this plaque clearly is designed to ensure that the proprietor’s business will prosper. But its connection to heat and fire may find its parallel in other examples of the phallus as an *apotropaia* in the ancient Roman world. In Pompeii, the

⁶⁴ Both relief and frame are made from Nocera tuff. The relief and the frame are both painted red. The overall dimensions (including the pediment) 65.5x30cm; internal dimensions of plaque: 32x21.5cm. The relief is 5cm high. The plaque is 2.43m above the pavement (Ling).

⁶⁵ The phallus is damaged at its base. The plaque is made from Nocera tuff. Overall dimensions (including pediment): 39x15.5cm. Internal dimensions: 23x9cm. The relief is approx. 1.5cm high. The plaque is 2.03m above the pavement (Ling).

⁶⁶ This relief is made from Nocera tuff in a terracotta frame. No traces of color apart from a white background have been found. The overall dimensions are 31.5x36.5cm; the internal dimensions are 25.5x28.5cm. The relief is approx. 1.5cm high. The plaque is 2.89m above the pavement (Ling).

⁶⁷ See chapter 1 of this paper for fuller discussion of the phallus bird.

⁶⁸ This plaque is made of Nocera tuff with a terracotta frame. The panel and the frame reveal traces of purplish red paint, but the cup may have been left grey (apart from a possible red line above its belly). Overall dimensions (including pediment): 42.5x47cm; internal dimensions: 19x40cm. The relief is approx. 1.5cm high. The plaque is 2.10m above the pavement (Ling).

ithyphallic and macrophallic bath servant in the House of Menander (I.10.40) warns of the heat in the caldarium which he guards; also in Pompeii, the painted, framed phallus outside the store at IX.7.1-2 announces the heat of the cauldron which it decorates; in Herculaneum, a plaque found in bakery depicts twin phalli walking on a pair of legs (Figure 58); and in the Roman Forum the sacred fire that the Vestal Virgins protect, a heat that is linked to the conception of Romulus and Servius Tullius, evokes concepts of erotica and fertility much like those announced by the *fascinus* engraved on the wall of their shrine.

As a whole, the city of Pompeii provides an excellent preservation of the iconographical apotropaic phallus---the interior and the exterior representations providing materials for a comprehensive study of the ancient Roman belief in the phallus as a semi-divine, powerful symbol. The neighboring city of Herculaneum, also preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., similarly offers many artifacts presenting the apotropaic phallus as a powerful, important symbol on material objects and painted frescoes. However, it appears as though this nearby city lacks the numerous phallic plaques so abundant in Pompeii.⁶⁹

Ostia

But the communal belief in the powers of the male genitalia is not limited to Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the cities of the region of Campania. Further north, close to a century later, the port city of Ostia Antica exhibits displays of the phallus that, in its own way, like those in the city of Pompeii, are in accord with the needs, construction practices, and dangers inherent to a city. The three in-situ examples of the phallus as an apotropaic image that remain in Ostia

⁶⁹ I have only come across two examples of phallic plaques found in Herculaneum (see text in paragraph above). As mentioned, these plaques were placed in a bakery: a pair above the door of the oven and another pair in the dough-room. See Maiuri, Amedeo. *Ercolano: i nuovi scavi (1927-1958)*. Roma: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria della Stato, 1958. page 458, figure 415.

directly recall the varying types of representation in Pompeii; but differ from their earlier southern predecessors in their placement, emphasis and detail.

Similar to the numerous phallic plaques that line shops, bakeries, gardens hotels and other public buildings in Pompeii, a phallic plaque adorns the exterior wall of the Terme dell'Invidioso (Figures 59-60), constructed in 50 A.D. with modifications made later by Antonius Pius.⁷⁰ Outside a heated chamber, evidenced by the hypocaust-like structure jutting out of the wall onto the street, a winged phallus is depicted in a plaque. The phallus, pointing to the left, is framed not by a terracotta border or surrounded by a terracotta temple, like many of the examples from Pompeii, but rather is framed by a painted border. Along the bottom edge of the plaque, horizontally under and vertically to the left of the phallus, an L-shaped arrow points upwards. The significance of this arrow remains a mystery: perhaps, standing in contrast to the downward sloping phallus, it seems to indicate the correct, erect position that the genitalia should take; or perhaps it is pointing metaphorically up, to the stars, to the heavens, to the gods, assimilating the phallus to its symbolic, semi-divine realm.

The phallus as an apotropaic symbol is again seemingly connected with heat and perhaps serves as a protection against its dangers, as in the examples in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Rome. But unlike the collection of phallic plaques in Pompeii, this plaque in Ostia is not placed above an entrance or near any intersection as were the Pompeian examples which offered good fortune and protection. The interesting placement of the plaque, directly in the middle of the long, exterior wall, perhaps is intended to protect the already vulnerable inhabitants of the baths. Also, unlike plaques from Pompeii, this plaque at Ostia decorates a bath building, not a

⁷⁰ This bath complex also includes another apotropaic image. In a black and white mosaic of a marine scene with fish and fisher in a boat, a grotesque little dwarf stretches out his hands in a motion of conjuration. Above his head the word *inbidiosos* is inscribed, signaling those against whom this gesture is intended. See Becatti, Giovanni, *Scavi di Ostia: Vol IV*, Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1953-. Page 219-220, Plate CLXIII and Dunbabin page 44 for a further discussion of this mosaic.

commercial shop or a garden. In Pompeii, the baths seem to be protected by a phallus placed on the interior, not the exterior (like those in the mosaics of the ithyphallic or macrophallic swimmers or bath attendants).

Just as the terracotta phallic plaque seems to borrow ideas and iconography from Pompeii but differs in its placement, significance, symbolism, so too do the other phallic depictions at Ostia. Directly derived from the macrophallic bath attendant guarding the caldarium in the House of the Menander in Pompeii, is the bath attendant in a mosaic in the Baths of Buticosus (I.IV.8) in Ostia, with his exaggerated genitalia, acts as an *apotropaia*, protecting the security of the baths (Figure 61). Designed in the reign of Trajan, between the years 112 and 115 A.D., the Baths of the Superintendent Buticosus⁷¹ display a naked male, identified by his label, *Epictetus Buticosus*, and his water-pail and strigil, as one who protects the entrance to the heated rooms.⁷² This mosaic closely parallels that of the House of Menander in its form and its function.⁷³ Just as the attendant's large phallus dominates the depiction in the Pompeian example, in the portrait from Ostia again the man's phallus, here in conjunction with large testicles, acts as the focus of the mosaic. Both southern and northern attendants direct the viewer to the important doorway---the Ethiopian of Pompeii with his left-to-right stance and Buticosus with his erect phallus pointing towards the right.⁷⁴ But greatly differing from his Pompeian antecedent, Buticosus is not a figure representing the "other," provoking laughter by his exoticness; Buticosus is a white male with thin, wide lips, a straight nose, and hair and beard that fall in loose, careful waves, not

⁷¹ John Clarke (*Looking*, p.303 note 53) states that the name Buticosus has no precedents. Clarke relates that "Anthony Corbeill suggests that it is Greek and may be a pun on the Greek verb *buo*, "to stuff;" *butikos* would then mean "involved in stuffing," and the Latin suffix *-osus* could give the meaning "the big stuffer" and designate a person (imaginary or real) renowned for the size of his penis"

⁷² Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia: Vol IV*, Page 29-30, Plate CIX.

⁷³ The mosaic is 2x3m with black and white tessere of 1cm.

⁷⁴ Clarke, *Looking*, 303 note 52.

tightly curled like the hair of African men in other mosaics.⁷⁵ Perhaps Buticosus' ethnicity reflects the absence in this cosmopolitan port city of the exotic, foreign stereotypes so common in Pompeii. The mosaic of Buticosus is strategically placed to protect both the entrance and the exit of the heated rooms: his erect phallus points directionally to the doorway leading to the caldarium, leading the bather to a safe passage; upon exiting, Buticosus' phallus is the first, most immediate sight from the doorway from the caldarium into the entry hall with the mosaic.

A black-and-white seascape mosaic of ithyphallic pygmies from tomb 16 in Ostia's Necropolis at Isola Sacra (Figure 62) recalls the ithyphallic swimmers of the private baths within houses of Pompeii.⁷⁶ Dating to the second half of the second century A.D., this mosaic, placed in the area in front of the columbarium, combines the apotropaic power of the pygmies demonstrated in examples from Pompeii with the central motif, the head of Oceanus. According to some scholars,⁷⁷ the head of Oceanus is an apotropaion, representing good luck. In this Nilotic mosaic, among the many pairs of pygmies standing on boats is one "outrageous" group depicting two male pygmies in an act of copulation.⁷⁸ From behind, one pygmy violently penetrates the other, who, seemingly "surprised at being penetrated," is busy poking a crocodile with a stick.⁷⁹ Just as their Pompeian predecessors did, these swimmers ward off evil spirits with both their large phalli and the laughter they provoke. But unlike the ithyphallic pygmies of the baths and private homes in Pompeii, this depiction is placed at a tomb, emphasizing the apotropaic role of the phallus in the realm of death and funerals. The scene created on the mosaic, the "frolics and the battles" of the pygmies, suggests a funeral banquet, conveying a festive air requiring

⁷⁵ Clarke, *Looking*, 134

⁷⁶ Located along the road between Ostia and the city of Portus (built up around the Trajanic harbor around 100A.D.), Isola Sacra, first excavated in the 1920s, was the result of a boom in Ostia's population and the filling up of an earlier necropolis along the Laurentine Road. For more information on Isola Sacra see Guido Calza, *Necropoli del porto di Roma nell'Isola Sacra* (Rome, 1940).

⁷⁷ Herbert Cahn, "Oceanus," *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologicae Classicae*, 8:914

⁷⁸ Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 212.

⁷⁹ Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 212.

apotropaic laughter and images both to celebrate the deceased and to keep away the evil spirits of the dead.⁸⁰

The Domus di Giove Fulminatore, an old house to the west of the Terme del Foro at Ostia (IV.IV.3) reflects both its Pompeian phallic predecessors and other in-situ phallic representations. The single-family house dates to six different phases, the earliest dating to 150B.C.-50A.D. Belonging to the second phase of construction, possibly beginning in the Augustan period, a black-and-white mosaic dated to the second century A.D. can be seen on the floor of the *fauces* of the house (Figure 63). The placement of this mosaic in the *fauces*, a position protecting the entrance of the house, closely corresponds to the placement of the fresco of ithyphallic Priapus in the vestibule of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii, of the mosaics of macrophallic bath attendants outside caldaria in both Pompeii and Ostia, and of the phallic terracotta plaques outside doorways on the streets of Pompeii. The black-colored phallus, distinct against its white background, is anatomically independent and modestly proportioned, unlike those phalli found in the interiors of Pompeian residences. This phallus more closely resembles the realistic depictions of genitalia seen on exterior, phallic plaques. Perhaps the closest topographical parallel of this phallus is the example of the phallus carved onto a street block on the Via Abbondanza in Pompeii. But while examples of black-and-white floor mosaics with the phallus as an apotropaic symbol do exist (for example the House of Menander and the Baths of Buticosus), the mosaic in the House of Jupiter the Thunderer presents the only example of a floor mosaic with a solitary, individual apotropaic phallus.

The phallus as an apotropaic image was an integral aspect of the cityscape. While these two cities differ in location, in time, in architecture, in planning and in population, the phallus as a predominant apotropaic symbol remains a constant. Perhaps the different details and emphasis

⁸⁰ Clarke, Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans, 212.

of the representations of these two specialized, unique cities can be attributed to the *translatio* in time and space between Pompeii and Ostia. But what remains clear is that Ostia indeed seems to have borrowed from the phallic iconography of Pompeii, adjusting the examples to its own population, its own time period, its own building materials.

Museum Phallic Objects

The Evil Eye represents the belief that envy, releasing “harmful particles” from the fixed stare of the envious, is able to harm or kill by supernatural means.⁸¹ As an apotropaic image, the phallus, “always erect, disproportionately large, or both,” makes an “aggressive statement calculated to scare off those whose gaze might harm, and, more generally, those whose intentions were malign.”⁸² Evidence of the phallus as an apotropaic symbol is not limited to the interior representations of the phallus on frescoes or mosaics and the exterior terracotta phallic plaques that adorn the buildings of a city. Removed from the houses, cemeteries, buildings and shops of a city, the collection of phallic artifacts includes amulets, lamps, votives, figurines, boundary markers, ornaments, tintinnabula and pottery. On each type of material or stylized artifact, the phallus is the device necessary to ward off evil from both home and person.

The phallus not only decorated and protected houses but also individuals. Amulets of bronze, brass, coral, bone or gold in the shape of a phallus were often worn as rings or pendants by both children and adults to ward off evil⁸³ (Figure 64). The ancient author Varro⁸⁴ attests to the custom of the phallic charm, mentioning that boys wore these apotropaic symbols to “prevent

⁸¹ Clarke, *Roman Sex*, 108.

⁸² Slane, 487, 488.

⁸³ See Appendix A for a catalogue of phallic amulets from the collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. For examples see London, British Museum, Marshall 2958, 2959, 2961, 2963, 2964, 3133; 1772.3-14.24, 34; 18872.6-4.340, 341. Amulets of apotropaic power could also take the form of astrological symbols such as the moon or numbers.

⁸⁴ *De lingua Latina* VII.97: *puerulis turpicula res in collo quaedam suspenditur, ne quid obsit*.

harm from coming to them.” Pliny, in the *Natural Histories* also mentions that babies wore phallic amulets as protection.⁸⁵

These amulets, promising safety and good fortune, were not only intended for human dress but could also be harness-trappings for horses.⁸⁶ A pair of bronze “horse amulets” in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, originally serving as some sort of “magical amulets” for race horses, includes two phallic protrusions⁸⁷ (Figure 65). And beyond the decoration of adult, child or baby, the amulets were commonly associated with the military. Pliny mentions a phallus hanging from the chariot of a triumphant general;⁸⁸ many phallic amulets carved on red-deer antlers were found on military grounds in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire.⁸⁹

Offering the same protection as a phallic amulet, or a protective terracotta plaque, mobiles and ornamental decorations were hung in courtyards of houses to ward off evil. Many examples of these apotropaic devices were accompanied by bells, stirred by the passing wind of the exterior courtyard, creating a sound which could ward off evil (Figure 66). These phallic tintinnabula were doubly apotropaic, the protective effect of the phallus strengthened by the ringing of the bells. Bells on their own, much like phallic amulets, were also placed around necks of babies or domestic animals to frighten away evil.⁹⁰ The tintinnabula, combining the phallus

⁸⁵ Pliny, *NH*, 28.39: *si dormiens spectetur infans, a nutrice terna adspui in os quamquam religione eum tutatur et fascinus, imperatorum quoque, non solum infantium, custos, qui dues inter sacra Romana a Vestalibus colitur, et currus triumphantium, sub his pendens, defendit medicus invidiae, iubetque eosdem respicere similes medicina linguae, ut sit exorata a tergo Fortuna gloriae carnifex.*

⁸⁶ Johns, 64.

⁸⁷ White, Donald. *Roman Athletics: Classical Antecedents to the National Mania*. *Expedition* 27.2 (1985) page 40.

⁸⁸ Pliny, *NH*, 28.39

⁸⁹ London, British Museum M 516. Johns, 64 explains that red-deer antler is easy to carve, readily available and strengthens the protective powers of the phallus by its association with a large, strong male beast, venerated for its fighting and sexual prowess.

⁹⁰ Clarke, *Roman Sex*, 97.

with bells, were sometimes strengthened by an additional apotropaic symbol, the portrayal of a frightening beast, weapons or wings.

Many examples of these mobiles from Pompeii and Herculaneum are housed in the *Gabinetto Segreto* today. A bronze tintinnabulum from the first century A.D. found in Herculaneum⁹¹ transforms the phallus into a winged creature with the hind parts of a lion (Figure 67). The four bells that hang from a wing, a paw, the head of the phallus and the erect genitalia of the lion section were clearly meant to safeguard the owner from any malevolent spirits. In another interesting example of a tintinnabulum,⁹² dating from the first century B.C. - the first century A.D., a gladiator with knife in hand is depicted attacking his own erect phallus, which takes on the form of a wolf, dog, beast or monster (Figure 68). It has been suggested that this mobile may express “a fear of sexuality as an uncontrollable animal urge.”⁹³ Other scholars⁹⁴ suggest that this object “epitomizes the strange ideological contradiction at the core of the gladiator’s masculinity...mark[ing] the ultimate fusion of sexuality with violence.”⁹⁵ But it seems more likely that, in its amalgamation of apotropaic devices, the phallus personified and the use of bells, this tintinnabula is intended to startle or amuse, provoking shock, repulsion or laughter which could ward away an evil force.

The phallic mobiles intensify their apotropaic power with the addition of or allusion to an ithyphallic deity. On a bronze tintinnabulum from Pompeii,⁹⁶ Mercury, a phallic god, is seated on his ithyphallic ram, an animal linked to Mercury’s phallic symbolism (Figure 69). Mercury is

⁹¹ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27837.

⁹² Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27853

⁹³ Johns, 68.

⁹⁴ Barton, C.A., *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. p. 73

⁹⁵ Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, 261. Levi, page 220, states that the gladiator is “one of the most audacious and unprejudiced human beings and consequently one of the most apt to destroy.”

⁹⁶ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27855

again portrayed on a bronze phallic tintinnabulum also from Pompeii⁹⁷ (Figure 70). In this example, currently missing its once-decorative bells, multi-phallic Mercury, identified by his wings, hat and money sack, clearly acted as a protective, apotropaic device, possibly inciting laughter or amusement, and warding off evil with his five phalli, four projecting erectly from his hat.

The phallus as an apotropaic device was not only used as dress and ornament but also in daily life, taking the form of lamps, tripods, pottery or serving ware. In examples from the *Gabinetto Segreto*, a terracotta macrophallic Pan or Faun becomes a hanging lamp⁹⁸ (Figure 71); a bronze tripod has legs in the form of three ithyphallic satyrs thrusting the palms of their left hands forward⁹⁹ (Figure 72); ithyphallic bronze Mercuries hold out trays for bread¹⁰⁰ (Figure 73); terracotta bowls, perhaps bird-bowls¹⁰¹, take the shape of a theatrical mask opening its mouth to reveal four phalli modeled in relief and in the round within¹⁰² (Figure 74).

Just as the phallus can take on the form of an animal or beast, acquiring certain attributes to strengthen its apotropaic force, so too can the organ become personified, transformed into a meta-anthropomorphic representation. The phallus can obtain human legs, as on a pendant in Boston¹⁰³ (Figure 75), or may be conflated with the human head, suggesting that “the two together may represent the whole essence of a figure, as in the herms.”¹⁰⁴ The merging of the phallus and the head, joining the “higher and lower aspects of humanity...the cerebral and

⁹⁷ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27854

⁹⁸ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27732. What makes this lamp (among other similar lamps in the collection) especially obscene and comic is that the lamp (and therefore the phallus) would have been filled with oil and the flame would emanate from the tip of the phallus, conjuring up images of ejaculation and the fire associated with lust.

⁹⁹ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27874. The gesture of thrusting the palm of the left hand forward was thought to ward off evil spirits.

¹⁰⁰ Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 143758-143761

¹⁰¹ Johns, 92, suggests that the object might be a birdbath and that the phallus inside would be a float when the bowl was filled with water.

¹⁰² Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27859

¹⁰³ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Res.08.320

¹⁰⁴ Johns, 72.

animal powers,” intensifies the force against evil. A pair of personified phalli, made into little individuals, is depicted on a terracotta figurine from the first century B.C. actually sawing an eye, the representation of evil, in half¹⁰⁵ (Figure 76). In this example, the phalli are literally overpowering the Evil Eye, thwarting any danger or threat. But other examples actually merge the phallus with the eye, an organ which itself can also be a charm against evil and threat,¹⁰⁶ a double apotropaic threat that can counter the Evil Eye even more strongly¹⁰⁷ (Figure 6). In other amulets, the phallus is associated with the human hand, presenting the sexually explicit, obscene gesture of the fingers curled and the thumb between the index and middle fingers¹⁰⁸ (Figure 78 and see Appendix A). Or in other examples, the middle finger extending from a clenched fist represents a circumcised phallus that was used as an apotropaeum, suggesting that an uncircumcised phallus was not effective against the Evil Eye. Ancient Latin authors also refer to this sign of the hand, the *digitus infamis*,¹⁰⁹ *impudicus*,¹¹⁰ *famosus*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ London, British Museum 1865.11-18.78. There is also a floor mosaic from Themetra in Africa Proconsularis which depicts an eye with a phallus pointing down at it with the inscription “what you see is for the envious; may it go well for the good and ill for the evil” (Slane, 488).

¹⁰⁶ A piece of Chian painted pottery from the late 7th century B.C. has an eye painted on the phallus (London, British Museum 1888.6-1.496C) (Figure 77). Johns, 66, comments that “‘eye’ beads, in blue and white glass, are still made in the Middle East with precisely this apotropaic function.” In many examples of Greek pottery, the phallus and the eye are merged: eye cups at times insert a phallus in place of a nose (Frag. Boston O8.31d, Frag. Acropolis 702); some eye cups have phallic foot stands (Oxford 1974.344). Francoise Frontisi-Ducroux in “Eros, Desire, and the Gaze” in *Sexuality in Ancient Art*. Ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.81-100, states that the “masculine gaze” is “sexualized” when it is “the male organ that is endowed with vision...in personifying their member into an autonomous creature, Greek men have many reasons for conferring sight on it, most especially when they make it into the volatile sidekick they enjoy seeing in the company of women” (93-94). The phallus combined with the eye, combined with sight, creates a phallus that is “experienced as a living being, and life is defined in ancient Greece in terms of sight” (94). This author takes the opinion that the “eye of the phallus may express the masculine right to look at a woman” (94). I believe, however, as stated in the text of this thesis, that the eye of the phallus is yet another reinforcement of the inherent apotropaic power within the organ itself.

¹⁰⁷ A terracotta figurine from Egypt depicts an ithyphallic boy on whose erect phallus there is an eye and the inscription “I have given the eye of the envious one a thorough drilling” (Slane 489).

¹⁰⁸ London, British Museum 1974.7-5.1 a bone amulet joining the phallus with the *mano fica* gesture; London, British Museum 1977.1-7.1 combines three lucky symbols, the hand, the phallus and the crescent. This gesture, called the *mano fica*, is still prominent in modern times. The modern Italian “fica” is slang for vulva, suggesting that perhaps these amulets actually present the rarely-depicted female genitalia as well.

¹⁰⁹ Perseus, 2.33

¹¹⁰ *Schol.* in Juvenal 10.52, *Priapea* 56.1-2, Martial 6.70.5

¹¹¹ Porphyrius in Horace, *Satire* 2.8.26

The phallus not only could attack but also could heal, taking the form of a votive offering at a temple, sanctuary or shrine. This use of the phallus reflects its religious, curative powers. These votive deposits could be connected with physical ailments or disorders, taking the form of the afflicted part of the body. This custom was especially prominent during the Roman Republic.¹¹² The phallic-shaped votives, popular throughout Italy, were intended to call on the deity likely to help the ailing body part (Figure 79). At Ponte di Nona, a healing shrine in Italy, some of the terracotta phallic votives reveal evidence of trouble in the urinary system; others suggest signs of *phimosis*, a painful condition caused by a tightness of the foreskin that may lead to impotence.¹¹³ Connected with medicine and religious practice, the phallus was also represented in cemeteries throughout Italy. On display in the *Gabinetto Segreto*, are two cippi from Perugia in the shape of phalli (Figure 80). These burial markers, protecting the dead and warding away evil spirits, may be connected to the role of Priapus as a guardian of the dead and of cemeteries. In another example from burial grounds, a roof tile Moesia Superior, depicting a phallus, is marked with a grave inscription, guarding the tomb from the envious.¹¹⁴

Whether coordinated interior decoration on walls and floors or solitary exterior, iconographic symbols, whether artistically embellished or bluntly straightforward, whether allegorized or literal, the phallus as an apotropaic symbol permeated all social classes, all geographical regions, all the different types of artistic media of Roman Italy during the first centuries of the imperial era. While many of the material examples, both *in-situ* and those currently in museums, elicit a laughter which may help to dispel evil, their principal apotropaic force lies in the semi-divine powers of the phallus. The laughter that may arise in response to the

¹¹² Johns, 57. In the *Gabinetto Segreto*, many phallic votives are on display from Cales from the middle of the 4th-2nd century B.C. (inv. 27768-27791).

¹¹³ Johns, 59.

¹¹⁴ The inscription reads “envious ones, whoever shits on this will be buggered.”

ithyphallic Priapus, the macrophallic “other,” or the multiphallic Mercury should be seen in relation to the amalgamation of phallus and beast, the addition of an eye, the linking of ejaculation with defecation, attributes that strengthen the power that is at the core of the warding away of evil, the phallus.

Chapter 4

The Phallus in Latin Literature: *lasciuam uerborum ueritatem* (Martial I.Prologue)

*hi libelli...non possunt sine
mentula placere* (Martial 1.35.3-5)

Throughout the first century A.D., for all social classes in Roman Italy, whatever other connotations this symbol may later acquire in the developing imagery of an urban society, the phallus portrayed in the physical, archaeological evidence retains its basic character as a religious, apotropaic symbol. Yet, at the same time, in the same culture, the phallus portrayed in the developed verbal arts has lost much of its apotropaic power, taking on, instead, a comedic and obscene significance. The power of laughter, only one of the many apotropaic forces associated with physical phallic artifacts, becomes, in literary representations, the main aspect of the phallus in Latin satire, epigrams, odes and lyric poetry. In both overt literary depictions and descriptions of the function of the phallus in the poems of Catullus, Martial and Juvenal, and in the poems addressed to or honoring Priapus in Horace, Tibullus and the *Priapea* collection, the poetic phallus, removed from reality and the imminent dangers of actual life and embedded in the conventions of Latin literature, invokes laughter, establishes vulgarity as a counterpoint to refinement, and is the primary weapon of invective.

This chapter will investigate the depiction of the phallus in elegy, epigrams, satire and Priapic odes, in works by Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Horace, Tibullus and the authors of the *Priapea*. Despite differences in poetic genre, form, theme and audience, the selected poems all similarly depict the phallus and its function. A thorough examination of the phallus in these literary works, whether the member is alluded to with euphemisms or presented with primary obscenities, will reveal the main, comic function of the textual phallus---to entertain, to elicit

laughter---a function which is ironically displaced from its solemn origins in the semi-divine phallus of amulets and street plaques.

The Phallus in Elegy, Epigrams and Satire: Catullus, Martial, Juvenal

Catullus

During the late Republic, Catullus becomes the first of a group of sexually explicit, comedic or obscene Latin poets using a sexual vocabulary “of real life”¹ to create a “whole idiosyncratic kind of poetry out of the ideas and language common in graffiti.”² The sexual metaphors used by Catullus are “largely coarse, emotive and current in slang, rather than precious in the manner of Greek epigram.”³ Catullus includes obscenities in all three meters in which he writes, iambic, hendecasyllabic and elegiac.⁴ The phallus for Catullus is not a means to protect, to ward away evil, but rather to comically insult or forcefully expose; the phallus becomes part of a sexual threat, a “metaphor for assertion of a questioned dominance over personal property,” used with “originality, consistency and brilliance” in Catullus’ poems.⁵

References to the phallus in literature are delivered through euphemisms, colloquialisms and allusions.⁶ Just as in Greek literature, the phallus in the Latin world could be suggested either by basic obscenities or metaphorical substitutions (including botanical terms, instruments, pointed objects, weapons, household objects, musical terms, agricultural terms, the nautical, the animalistic, and personification). These varied euphemisms, ranging from provocative to

¹ Adams, 220

² Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 164

³ Adams, 220

⁴ Archilochus and Hipponax, writing in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. respectively, were the first to write sexually explicit, obscene poetry in iambic verse. Of the primary obscenities and their derivatives in Catullus, 6 are in iambic meter, 19 in hendecasyllabic and 14 in elegiac meter.

⁵ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 141

⁶ See Appendix B

amusing to obscure, seem appropriate to their intended contexts: for it is as if “the phallus itself were magic, able to exist at the center of the area of the obscene without taint or injury.”⁷

In the everyday euphemisms of the time, Catullus often alludes to the phallus by reference either to another body part or to the general anatomical area where the genitalia are found. This vague, general reference adds to the intended humor, including the listener or reader in the popular language of the time, forcing him to visualize the intended body part. The phallus is metaphorically implied by the *nervosius illud* (that stronger force) needed to *zonam solvere virgineam* (loosen the maiden’s girdle)(67.27-28). The comparative form of *nervosius* stands in contrast to the *iners sterili semine* (impotence with a sterile seed) but matches the *caeco amore* (ungovernable passion), intensifying the intended humor of the scene. *Medius*, signaling the area in which genitalia are found, clearly alludes to the phallus, as Catullus amusingly remarks, *grandia ter medii tenta vorare viri* (that you swallow the large tautness at the middle of a man)(80.6). This phrase not only refers to the phallic region with *medii* but also to the erect state of the phallus with the metaphor evoked by *tenta*. This word, with both musical and military connotations, conveys the contrasting tautness or limpness of a pulled string. Similarly in Poem 16, an attack against Aurelius and Furius with explicit vulgarities, *lumbos* refers to the phallus in an amusingly denigrating way: *sed his pilosis, qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos* (but those hairy ones who are unable to stir the hard loins). In Poem 6, the phallus, worn out from sexual intercourse, is humorously implied with the word *latus*, creating the explicit, comic visual image of a *latera ecfututa* (poured out side).

The phallus can also obliquely be referred to by euphemisms concerning tools or instruments, allusions which highlight the member’s shape. The *sicula* (dagger) in Poem 67 hangs comically *languidior tenera...beta* (more limp than an unripe beet). In this statement both

⁷ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 67.

the *sicula* and the *beta* allude to the phallus, one image evoking an erect organ, the other a flaccid member. In a later example, the Latin prose writer Suetonius⁸ states that Augustus coined the interchangeability between *betzio* and *languéo*, a substitution that suggests that a *beta* could represent a *mentula languida*.⁹

The comic phallus used by Catullus in invective poems is represented not only by euphemisms but also with more straightforward, direct, primary obscenities. The Latin word *penis* in Catullus can either be read as a metaphor for the phallus or as a primary obscenity. According to Cicero,¹⁰ *caudam antiquè “penem” vocabant, ex quo est propter similitudinem “penicillus”; hodie penis est in obscenis* (the writers of antiquity were calling a tail “penis,” from which comes, because of the likeness, *penicillus* (the word for paintbrush); but today “penis” is among the obscene words). Cicero goes on to state that, because of its common use, the word *penis* has become as obscene a word as *mentula*. Catullus, in Poems 15 and 25, mentions the *penis* as a direct replacement for phallus; the classical meaning of *penis* as “tail” had become obsolete by the period in which Catullus is writing.¹¹ In a poem to Aurelius, Catullus states that *verum a te metuo tuoque pene* (indeed I fear you and your phallus)(15.9); and in an attack against effeminate Thallus, Catullus accuses his addressee of being *pene languido senis* (more drooping than a phallus of an old man) (25.3). With the use of *penis*, Catullus adds a layer of subtlety to his biting attack, an allusion which represents the phallus not as defensive, but rather as offensive, an active agent in attack.

⁸ Aug. 87.2

⁹ Adams, 26 states that “there is no evidence that *beta* was ever in use in an anatomical sense.”

¹⁰ Fam 9.22.2. a “jeu d’esprit on a frivolous subject [rather] than a serious analysis of Cicero’s feelings about decorum” (Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 18).

¹¹ Adams, 35

Catullus seems to prefer metaphorical allusions to the phallus but still uses the primary obscenity *mentula* in his poems;¹² for the “models for Catullus’ use of direct obscenities” came not from previous literary models but rather from real life, from “the sub-culture of low abuse.”¹³ This reflection of surrounding reality explains Catullus’ preference for and reliance on phallic euphemisms, the vulgarity of which would both appeal more and be all the more biting to his contemporary readers. Therefore, the instances of *mentula* throughout his poems are connected with humorous adjectives, settings, personifications or intended associations. For example, *Mentula* becomes the nickname for Caesar’s henchman Mamurra in seven of the eight instances of the word’s use (poems 29, 94, 105, 114, 115).¹⁴

Mamurra is first introduced in Catullus’ collection of poems as a *mentula*, a nickname that clearly reflects Catullus’ disgust at Mamurra, at his ostentatious and licentious behavior. As a group, these poems ridicule Mamurra, assigning the nickname *mentula* as his *nom de guerre* rather than a “pseudonym designed to conceal Mamurra’s identity.”¹⁵ In line 13 of Poem 29, Mamurra’s phallic pseudonym is alluded to with Catullus’ phrase *ut ista vestra diffututa mentula ducenties comesset aut trecenties* (was it so that that your debauched phallus might devour twenty or thirty millions?). *Mentula* occurs twice in one line in the two-line Poem 94. The word play, chiasmus, onomatopoeia and alliteration of *mentula moechatur. Moechatur mentula?* (the phallus fornicates. What, a fornicating phallus?) comically highlight the obscenity while simultaneously creating a play on the name and the sounds of Mamurra.¹⁶ Mamurra is not only called a *mentula* but is doubly insulted by the gender of the Latin word: “this man designated by

¹² This word occurs 8 times in his poems (occurring twice in one line in Poem 94)

¹³ Adams, 11

¹⁴ 29 is the only poem in the group in iambic meter; the other 4 are all elegiac epigrams.

¹⁵ Catullus. *The Poems*. Ed. Kenneth Quinn. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996.

¹⁶ Paul Claes (“Catullus C. 94: The Penetrated Penis.” *Mnemosyne*, Vol. XLIX, 1996) notices that the “feminine term *mentula* calls for a passive meaning of *moechari*: to act like a *moecha*, a seduced wife.”

a feminine term must be an effeminate i.e. a passive homosexual...Mr. Prick is penetrated himself.”¹⁷

In Poem 105 Catullus again ridicules Mamurra’s literary pretensions¹⁸ by alluding to Mamurra with the previous association, *mentula*. Mamurra, a *mentula*, is a person who, although he *conatur Pipleum scandere montem* (strives to climb the Piplean mount), fails at writing and *Musae furcillis praecipitem eiciunt* (the Muses with pitchforks throw him out headlong). Poems 114 and 115 conflate *mentula* and Mamurra in an attack against him as a landed proprietor. In Poem 114, Mamurra is a *mentula* who *firmano saltu non falso...dives fertur* (is said not falsely to be rich in possession of land at Firmum) but foolishly *fructus sumptibus exsuperat* (spends more than the estate brings in).¹⁹ Likewise, Poem 115, describing the estate of Firmum, substitutes *mentula* for Mamurra. Mamurra, a *mentula*, may *habet iuxta triginta iugera prati* (have something like thirty acres of land) but he is still wasteful, *ipsest maximus ultro* (himself the greatest wonder of all), a *vero mentula magna minax* (a monstrous menacing cock). Catullus uses the blunt, straightforward obscene word for phallus only in a direct attack against an enemy.

Poem 37 stands apart from all other phallic representations within Catullus’ poetry. This poem presents the only example of *mentula* not attached to Mamurra and the only possible allusion to architectural phallic illustrations so common in the apotropaic phallic plaques in Pompeii. This “comic-satiric” poem, a lampoon, describes a brothel nine doors down from the temple of Castor and Pollux where Lesbia’s lovers gather to boast of their lecherous achievements.²⁰ Catullus asks these *contubernales* (attendants) *solis putatis esse mentulas vobis, solis licere, quidquid est puellarum* (do you think that you alone have phalli, you alone are

¹⁷ Claes

¹⁸ See Catullus poem 57.7 where Mamurra and Caesar are described as *uno in lecticulo erudituli*

¹⁹ For Mamurra spending money freely see Catullus’ introduction to Mamurra as a *mentula*, poem 29, line 13-22

²⁰ Catullus. The Poems. Ed. Kenneth Quinn. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996. 202-203

allowed to screw all the girls). The *mentula* is not embellished or personified but clearly reflects the actions of the regular clientele at the whore-house.

Later in the same poem, Catullus may be referring to the phallic depictions that lined taverns and shops of a Roman city when he states that *totius vobis frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam* (I was writing all over the front of the tavern phallic things against you). This graphic threat seems to be a mark of contempt, offending the inhabitants within the shop. This obscure word for phallus, *sopio*, also appears in obscene, offensive graffiti in Pompeii.²¹

Martial

Martial's epigrams, written towards the end of the first century A.D., are most explicitly meant to provoke laughter with their numerous primary obscenities. Martial even insists many times throughout his writing that his epigrams are meant to be *ioci*, fitting for festivals such as the Saturnalia²² and the Floralia,²³ stating in epigram 11.15, *hic totus volo rideat libellus et sit nequior omnibus libellis* (I wish that this little book may laugh from end to end and be naughtier than all my other little books). The phallus in Martial is not only amusing but also the substance behind his poetry, for *hi libelli...non possunt sine mentula placere* (these little books are not able to please without the phallus)(1.35.3-5). The invective that Martial, taking "pleasure...in obscene language," uses is not "fairly restrained in language" as in the numerous poems of Catullus, but rather is meant as a mockery, a taunt, an attack that can use euphemisms or primary obscenities, many words or a single word to "create a shock."²⁴ Martial's collection of epigrams, in both their

²¹ *CIL* IV.1700 "dicet nobis Sineros et sopio"

²² Martial, 4.14, 11.2.5, 10.18.3, 10.87.7

²³ 1. Prologue. At the festival of the Floralia, begun in 173 B.C., the Romans enjoyed farces, indecent and blatant sexual language and obscenity.

²⁴ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 108, 132

erotic and invective functions, offering a complete image of Rome, “afford[s] an irreplaceable spectrum of the sexual attitudes found only piecemeal in other authors.”²⁵

Martial’s blunt, direct obscenity was, according to the author himself, amusing to sophisticated and upper class readers, *ut de illis queri non possit quisquis de se bene senerit* (that no one who forms a good judgment of himself is able to complain about them) and he adds, *absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpret* (let the malignant interpreters be absent from the frankness of my jests)(1.Prologue). To Martial, the phallus is the perfect symbol for his intended obscenity and humorous jokes, a force, the means of making a man abandon his *severitate* (austerity) for *nequiore* (licentiousness) and *lascivis iocis* (wanton jokes) (4.14.6-12).

Martial focuses primarily on the basic obscenity for the phallus, the *mentula*, the archetype for all obscenities, a word which fills his epigrams, appearing forty-eight times, and makes *luxuria pagina nulla vacat* (no page in [his] verses without wantonness) (3.69.4). He denigrates and effeminizes other poets’ writings that lack obscenities such as *mentula*, characterizing them as *castis...verbis* (chaste words) fitting for boys and virgins. In a later book, Martial again praises the direct use of *mentula* as the original word for phallus “*par excellence*.”²⁶ In Epigram 11.15, Martial rejects phallic euphemisms, stating *nec per circuitus loquatur illam* (nor speak about that in a roundabout way), and praises the *mentula*, the *omnium parentum* (parent of all), which even *sanctus Numa* (holy Numa) used, and *mentulam vocabat* (was calling it *mentula*).

Mentula in Martial can be abusive and violent, but can also be used neutrally. In these epigrams, the *mentula* is not offensive but rather individualized, matter of fact, personified, almost real; it is something that *dolet et queritur* (grieves and complains) (1.58.3): it is *non*

²⁵ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 140

²⁶ Adams, 9

est...quod digitus (not that which is a finger) (6.23.2); in connection with the mind, it *non...cadit* (does not fall) (7.18.12); described as Roman, it *nulla placet* (is not pleasing) (7.30.8); or it is the only thing *nota* (known) to *pudicitiae...meae* (my pure woman) (10.63.8).

While Martial's straightforward obscenity elicited laughter, so too did his rarer, more creative, euphemistic metaphors. Often it is the comically exaggerated adjective or evoked image that adds to the humor presented by the phallus. The male genitalia in Martial's epigrams could be referenced by other non-sexual anatomical terms, medical vocabulary, weapons, instruments, body parts, musical instruments or animals. The Latin *vena* (blood vessel, vein, artery, a water-course) is transformed into the phallus with the amusing attributes *saucia* (wounded) (4.66.12), *rigida* (erect) (6.49.2), and *pallida* (pale) (11.16.5). The *verpa*, often a complement to the *mentula*, occurs most commonly in vulgar speech and graffiti²⁷ but is also found within Martial's epigrams as a direct substitute for the phallus, the instrument through which a man can *meiere* (urinate) (11.46.2). The medical pun on *aluta* (a soft-leather that had a medical use) (11.60.3)²⁸ makes the phallus of Priam into something that an itch or sore could stretch.

The phallus is explicitly alluded to with vulgarity when connected to the mention of a larger area of the body or body parts. *Medius*, representing the phallus is the *viros* (manly) area which the *lambebat...improba lingua* (the improper tongue was licking) (2.61.2) and is again in a later book, the *viros* area that *debet...lambere lingua* (the tongue ought to lick) (3.81.3). In a similar allusion, Martial substitutes the direct word for phallus with the general area in which the organ may be found, the *latus* (the side) (7.58.3, 12.97.4). This word, "vaguely suggestive of the

²⁷ *CIL* IV.1655, 1884, 2360, 2415, 4876, 8617

²⁸ It may refer to an *emplastrum* or plaster. The *mentula* is likened to leather also in Petronius 134.9 and Martial 7.58.3, 10.55.5.

male genitalia...is used particularly often to express the general site of the exhaustion which might follow intercourse,” as can be seen in the man’s *latus madidoque* (worn out side).²⁹

The phallus alone can be represented by the synecdoche *inguen* (groin) (3.81.5, 7.30.5, 7.58.3), which is, in some of its occurrences in Martial’s epigrams, associated with foreign people and their customs: the *inguen* of Book 3 is connected to a Gaul and the *inguen* of Book 7 refers to a *recutitorum...iudaeorum* (circumcised Jew). Also the phallus can be alluded to by the phrase *inguinis arma* (weapon of the groin) (6.73.6), a pairing of nouns that emphasizes the potentially violent nature of the phallus. Similarly, the *lumbus* (loin) as a whole represents the individual phallus when Martial mentions the girls who *vibrabunt sine fine pruiantes lascivos docili tremore lumbos* (shake with endless prurience lascivious loins in practiced writhing) (5.95.27-28). The erect phallus can also be represented by pointed, hardened objects or tools of a similar shape. The Latin *tendo* may allude to the phallus by the implied tautening and relaxing of the strings on the bow, emphasizing the erect position of the phallus.³⁰

Even gods’ names can be substituted for the phallus. Martial uses *Venus* in place of *mentula*,³¹ a euphemism which evokes a more substantive, important quality than the everyday use of *mentula*. Martial also suggests the Italic ithyphallic god Mutunus Titinus and his prominent symbol of the phallus, with the derivative of the god’s name, *mutuniatus*. In 3.73.1 and 11.63.1 the *mutuniatis* evokes an erect, well-endowed phallus, a phallus that is both aesthetically and sexually pleasing. This same phallic deity is evoked again in 11.51 but this time in connection with Priapus, as Martial states that *tanta est quae Titio columna pendet* (Titius has hanging from him a column as big as the one worshipped by the girls of Lampsacus).³²

²⁹ Adams, 49

³⁰ 6.71.3, 7.67.2, 11.58.1, 11.73.3

³¹ 3.75.6, 1.46.2. The Latin word *venus* may also be used to refer to sexual intercourse.

³² *Columna* as a euphemism for phallus can be seen again in the Priapic epigram 6.49.3

Martial occasionally personifies the phallus, highlighting specific characteristics that add to its perceived strength and threatening power. In 2.33, Martial refers to the phallus by its descriptive attributes, *calva, rufa, lusca* (bald, redheaded, one-eyed). In 9.37.10, Martial repeats the portrayal of the phallus as *lusca*, warning that *et sit lusca licet, te tamen illa videt* (even if it may be one-eyed, it still sees you).

The specific choice of adjectives, verbs and nouns that Martial uses to accompany direct or euphemistic references to the phallus highlights the phallus' intended comedic or, at times, invective or even pornographic role: *rumpis...latus* (you burst your side) (12.97.4); *stare...tibi iam pridem mentula desit* (your phallus gave up standing long ago) (3.75.1); *mentula demens* (crazy phallus) (3.76.3); *domini bibentis ebrium regit penem* (he guides the drunk phallus of his drinking master) (3.82.17); *at nunc pro cervo mentula supposita est* (but now a phallus has been substituted for a deer) (3.91.12); *saepe soloecismum mentula nostra facit* (often my phallus commits a mistake) (11.19.2); *inguina saltem parce fututrici sollicitare manu* (refrain from stirring their groins with your fornicating hand at least) (11.22.3-4). Even the common diminutive form of the noun for phallus may create a playful mood, transforming the abstract phallus into something personal, something appreciated. For example, euphemisms such as *pipinnam* (11.72.1) and *mutuniati* (11.63.2) allude to the phallus in an endearing, intimate, affectionate way.

The laughter that is elicited by Priapus' grotesquely exaggerated phallus in frescoes is related to the humor of the jokes involving the blunt, straightforward words for phallus in Martial's epigrams. But unlike Priapus' exposure which, although inciting laughter by the exaggerated representation of the genitalia, is primarily an example of the apotropaic symbolism of the phallus, the exposure and revelation of the phallus in Martial's epigrams function

primarily as comedy: Priapus lifts the fabric of his tunic, revealing a phallus to amuse, but mainly to protect; Martial lifts the severity and heaviness of language, revealing a phallus in a lighthearted mood, in a *ioci*, in order to entertain with *festosque lusus* (festive jests) (1.Prologue).

Juvenal

In later Latin satire, the phallus recurs, altered from the comic euphemisms and invective obscenity in Catullus and its explicitly comic role so pervasive in Martial becoming only a scattered usage in Juvenal, who occasionally refers to the male organ with euphemisms and indirect references; for in Juvenal's poetry, the "sexual language of satire became similar to that of polite prose...import[ing] an occasional metaphor or striking expression."³³ The phallus in the literature of the earlier writers, whether depicted with the direct *mentula* or with the more varied, imaginative euphemisms, took on a prominent, inclusive role, acting as the primary implement for comedy, invective and entertainment. In Juvenal, whose satire is "an expression of both his and his audience's hostility," the phallus is adapted to the satiric genre of the author, comically adding a supplementary, subtle layer of attack, of assault.³⁴ In satiric complaints about the current degradation of the state, rants against institutions and culture, the phallus is no longer the primary symbol of attack and insult but rather one more insult or weapon against the cause Juvenal ridicules with his own words. The phallus in Juvenal's sexual satires does not address the "problems of impotence" but rather the "struggle for power," "draw[ing] together elements common to all levels of Latin invective."³⁵ Juvenal, the satirist, representing the "norm...obviously cannot directly represent the obscene as well."³⁶

³³ Adams, 221-222

³⁴ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 200

³⁵ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 201

³⁶ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 66

The phallus in Juvenal's satires is passive rather than active; it remains limp, causing shame. In each euphemistic allusion to the phallus, its small size, flaccid or shrunken state, adds to its shameful image: merit is comically judged by the size of the phallus, for *partes quisque suas ad mensuram inguinis heres* (each heir's reward is assessed by the size of his organ) (1.41). Just as in Catullus, the phallus is suggested with the Latin word *nervuus* (tendon or sinew), a word which seems to emphasize size. But whereas in Catullus the metaphorical phallus is described in a comparative, emphatic form, *nervosius illud*, a form emphasizing its power, in Juvenal, the recurring use of *nervuus* highlights the weak, small phallus: *nil faciet longi mensura incognita nervi* (the unheard of length of your dangling phallus will count for nothing)(9.34); *iacet exiguus cum ramice nervus* (his shrunken phallus with a rupture just lies there)(10.20.5).

Small size is again mocked with the euphemisms *cicer*, *venus* and *tendo*, attributes which cause shame. The people *follisque pudet cicerisque relict* (feel ashamed of the half-grown phallus they've been left with)(6.373B) and the *veneris languenis* (limp phallus) is no longer an *acres...urticae* (sharp aphrodisiac)(11.167). But the size of a phallus may also be too large: for it is not easy and proper that *agere intra viscera penem legitimum atque illic hesternae occurrere cenae* (a proper-sized phallus penetrate into the flesh and there encounter yesterday's dinner) (9.43-44); and an erect phallus can cause great embarrassment for *magis ille extenditur, et mox...concepta urina movetur* (the more he is erect, soon the begun urine is moved) (11.170). Comically and ironically, it is the *matura inguina* (mature phallus), neither too small nor too big, that *traduntur medicis* (is traded to the doctor) (6.369-370) and cut off.

The Priapic Phallus: Priapea, Odes to a Phallic God

Horace

The phallus in both material artifacts and in literary sources could be either individually represented or anatomically joined. In the archaeological phallic evidence, both the solitary phallus on plaques, amulets and votives and the phallus on Priapus or comic “others” protected the inhabitant, the viewer, the wearer. In literature, the phallus is not only a comic, invective symbol when solitary, but also when it becomes the identifying symbol of the ithyphallic god Priapus, a god who can himself “be constructed as a talking phallus.”³⁷ The iconographic symbolism of Priapus, a “powerful symbol not only of sexual norms in society but of the relation of literature and humor to those norms,” in his many roles and with his giant phallus, pervaded not only visual media but also the literary genre.³⁸ The numerous odes to Priapus, found in Horace, Tibullus and the *Priapea*, pay homage to this god and his phallus with the same comedic, vulgar or invective mood that so characterized the phallus in the Latin poetry of the time.³⁹ Whether or not a poem forms part of the *Corpus Priapeorum*, the poems to Priapus share

³⁷ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 116

³⁸ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 162

³⁹ Hypotheses have been made that attribute three Priapic fragments to the missing poems 18, 19 and 20 of Catullus. John Zarker (“Catullus 18-20.” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 93 (1962), 502-522) makes a case for the Catullan authorship, commenting on their Priapic meter, common to Catullus, and their appropriate placement after Poem 17. Guy Lee, editor of a collection of Catullus’ poems, states that only the first of these fragments is genuine. These three poems are close to the style of the *Priapea* or to Martial’s Priapics. In the first poem from the *Catalepton*, Priapus fears the cold because the farmers may use him for firewood; in the second and third poems, Priapus is a dry stump who guards a diminutive garden. Many Priapic themes can be seen throughout Catullus’ poems, however, including attacks on thieves and adulterers and descriptions of their attacks on the god. For a discussion of the Priapic Catullus, see Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, pages 144-156. Martial too wrote poems to Priapus (6.16, 6.49, 6.72, 6.73, 7.91, 8.40, 14.69). Martial’s Priapus is feeble, a wooden country bumpkin or guardian of a pitiable garden to be mocked and belittled. Martial makes Priapus a “divine buffoon” (Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 127). For Ovid’s treatment of Priapus, see Fantham, 185-216. Ovid’s *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* are fairly inoffensive, employing euphemisms for the phallus that are “colourless,” (*inguinis*, *Am* 3.7.6; *membra* *Am* 3.7.13; *corpora* *Am* 3.7.28; *nervos* *Am* 3.7.35; *pars pessima nostril* *Am* 3.7.69; *hanc* *Am* 3.7.73) (Adams, 224). But Adams states (224) that “allusions to sexual parts of the body are far more numerous in Ovid than in Tibullus or Propertius...and are likely to derive from the polite educated language.” In elegy in particular, metaphors which tend to focus on the *mentula* are avoided: “the metaphors which do occur are anatomically inexplicit and often paralleled in Greek” (Adams, 224-225). Of the three elegists addressed, I have

common characteristics and depict his wooden manufacture, watchman function, red and threatening phallus, his *hurrundo* (wreath worn by a deity and a trap for birds).⁴⁰ Amy Richlin has highlighted the importance of Priapus as a representative of the obscene in Latin poetry, labeling the area of the obscene as the “garden of Priapus,” with the “figure of Priapus...stand[ing] at the center of the garden...as an exact parallel for the figure of the satirist. Both dominate (without owning) special areas, and both threaten those within these areas.”⁴¹

Many of the attributes of and imaginative metaphors for the phallus in Latin poetry are personified in the figure of Priapus, an embodiment that emphasizes and highlights the most representative qualities of the comic phallus in literature. In Satire 1.8, Horace actually takes on the voice of Priapus, himself becoming the representative of the phallus in its statue form in the Gardens of Maecenas. The comedic representation of this ithyphallic Priapus epitomizes the humor associated with the phallus in the written medium. From the opening line, the absurdity and comedy are apparent: Priapus is created by chance, the *olim truncus...ficulnus* (once a fig tree’s trunk) could have yielded a stool, but the carpenter *malvit esse deum* (preferred it to be a god). In fact, fig wood was of poor quality and could not be used for building due to its softness; therefore, the *ficulnus* in these opening lines might merely suggest “good for nothing,” highlighting its feebleness.⁴²

As the satire continues, Priapus announces his protective role: *deus inde ego, furum aviumque maxima formido* (thus I am a god, the great terror of thieves and of birds). Priapus defines himself as a watchman over the gardens which included a cemetery for the burial of

chosen to focus on Tibullus who wrote entire poem devoted to Priapus. The attention to Tibullus is not due to his sexual euphemisms but rather to his version of a *Priapea*.

⁴⁰ Parker, 15.

⁴¹ *Garden of Priapus*, 66

⁴² O’Connor, 84. For a more detailed discussion on the pun of *ficus* at the end of the satire, see O’Connor, 84-85.

slaves, paupers and bankrupts.⁴³ But whereas he claims that his phallus is the agent of protection, *nam fures dextra coercet obscenoque ruber porrectus ab inguine palus* (my right hand keeps thieves away along with my red shaft rising obscenely from my groin), in fact, his grotesque organ is more an element of comedy and it is his final expulsion of gas that disperses the witches, *nam diplosa sonat quantum vesica pepedi diffissa nate ficus* (my buttocks of fig wood burst with a crack as loud as the sound of a bursting bladder). The adjectives used to describe the initial block of wood from which Priapus is carved, *inutile lignum*, actually seem to portray Priapus' flaccid, ineffective phallus. Priapus is depicted not as the threatening god he claims to be, purportedly intentionally warding away evil with his phallus, but rather as a humorous figure, "a wooden idol to whom the poet gives ridiculous speeches," whose accidental flagellation, the "comic result of his fear," is the very act that rids the gardens of *quantum carminibus quae versant atque venenis humanos animos* (those who trouble human souls with their drugs and their incantations).⁴⁴ Priapus' twofold character, a god who actively threatens and protects and "a ridiculous god, a god to be mocked," serves to question the gods' relations with man, a theme prominent in Roman satire⁴⁵ and seems to make Satire 1.8 "comic, vulgar and utterly degrading."⁴⁶

Horace's Priapus, "devoid of the salty lust normally exhibited and boasted about by the god of the *Priapea* and familiar myths," has become weak, losing his identifying, characteristic weapon, his phallus.⁴⁷ The comic Priapus, "rather genial, inoffensive, easily shocked," stands in contrast to the evil subversion of the witches and "may suggest, in a humorous understated

⁴³ Parker, 15. For bankrupts see line 11-Nomentanus and Pantolabus.

⁴⁴ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 141; Anderson, 13

⁴⁵ Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 141

⁴⁶ O'Connor, 84

⁴⁷ Anderson, 9

manner, some of the values of Maecenas' Circle," a political group to which Horace himself was closely aligned.⁴⁸

Material examples of Priapus, from frescoes in Pompeii (Figure 23) to votive figurines found on boats (Figure 24), represented the phallus as the ultimate, powerful source of protection. While Satire 1.8 can be seen as a commentary on and reflection of this pervasive role of the phallus in the contemporary material culture, this literary work actually distorts and negates the phallus' divine, protective role, creating a comedic mockery of reality.

Tibullus

Priapus and his phallus again become dissociated from their protective role in Tibullus' Elegy 1.4, the longest of the Priapic poems.⁴⁹ This poem, constructed in the form of a dialogue between the poet and the god, portrays Priapus as the advisor for the love sick. Comically, the poem begins with an exaggerated opening prayer,⁵⁰ complimenting Priapus and his *sollertia* (cunning) and granting him *umbrosa...tectae* (sheltering shade) to protect him from the harm of sun and snow. This flattering introduction ironically leads to the ridiculous depiction of Priapus in the following lines: *certe non tibi barba nitet, non tibi culta coma est; nudus et hibernae producis frigora brumae, nudus et aestivi tempora sicca Canis* (certainly a beard shines for you, nor is your hair well-kempt. Naked you are all throughout the cold and stormy winter, naked through the parching season of the Dog-star's heats). The comic opening, juxtaposing an

⁴⁸ Anderson, 10-11. On page 12, Anderson notes that Book I of Horace's satires shows "admiration for Maecenas and the creative goals of political and literary development to which Octavian's advisor dedicated himself."

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of this poem and its Hellenistic correspondences, see Luck, Georg. *The Latin Love Elegy*. London: Methuen & Co., 1969. 92-99. Luck states that in its "main theme (homosexual love), structure (dialogue) and the fiction of a talking statue (Priapus)," Tibullus' 1.4 is very Hellenistic.

⁵⁰ The homage to and importance of Priapus seen in the opening prayer that begins Tibullus' ode to Priapus can also be seen throughout Petronius' *Satyricon*. This mock epic comically depicts Encolpius, afflicted by the *ira Priapi*, seeking a cure for his impotence. See Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 190-195 for a detailed discussion of Petronius. On page 192, Richlin portrays Priapus as "only a powerful directive presence outside the narrative." Priapus and his phallus are not holy or seriously revered but rather "just as ridiculous as Encolpius" (195).

exaggerated, flattering prayer to the god with a ludicrous depiction of him, sets the humorous mood of mockery that pervades the rest of the poem.

Unlike his protective role against evil and thieves as represented in the art of the time, his phallus as the active weapon of protection, in this poem, Priapus instructs and warns handsome boys about love, verbally attacking the boys who prefer money over love. The phallus is not a method of protecting but rather the *curva...falce* (curved hook) is the sensual, bodily attribute that lends Priapus the ability to instruct on love. Tibullus' Priapus becomes the agent representing literary praise, honoring poetry (lines 61-66) and attacking the "spirit of materialism which is hostile to poetry and the arts" (lines 59-60, 67-70).⁵¹

Corpus Priapeorum

The opening prayer that begins Tibullus' ode to Priapus reappears throughout many of the *Priapea*, a collection of poems of unknown authorship from the 1st century A.D.⁵² These eighty poems, presenting the best examples of Priapic poetry, range in theme, language and vulgarity. The phallus in this Priapic collection, whether crudely, violently or humorously presented, is ultimately constructed to amuse and entertain, a goal introduced in the first two epigrams which announce the frivolous subject, "the parody, facetiousness, mockery and jest [that] dominate" the following poems.⁵³ In a kind of *apologiae*, the author of *Priapea* 1 warns the reader *concepiens Latio pone supercilium* (lay aside your Roman prudery) and looking at Priapus' *inguen* or his *parti, ista lege* (read this!); the author of *Priapea* 2, having not called on the Muses for inspiration, likewise concedes that the phallic playful subjects (*ludens*) are *horto carmina digna, non libello* (songs more worthy for a garden than a book).

⁵¹ Luck, 95

⁵² For a discussion of the probable author/authors, see Parker, 32-36

⁵³ Parker, 41

These poems, pervaded with primary obscenities,⁵⁴ expose Priapus, his nakedness (1,9) and his rustic wooden origin (6, 10, 25, 56, 63), and his “salient member,” its size (1, 6,8, 18, 30, 36), its rigidity (6, 10, 20, 63, 70, 79), its red color (1, 72) and its wetness (48).⁵⁵ The poems were supposed to be tacked onto the wooden image of the god in a garden, a placement which allows for the pretense of the god to be speaking the very words written in the poem. The reader, either a worshipper or a thief in Priapus’ garden, is presumably standing in front of the words and the statue, reading the poem.⁵⁶

Of the first twenty seven poems in which Priapus is depicted as a god, receiving or expecting worship, practicing divine actions, parodies on religious poems, the erect phallus appears in ten poems, acting as the primary source of jest. The phallus becomes a comedic threat in the second twenty-seven poems which portray the actions of the rustic, wooden, crudely carved Priapic statues. The obscene, vulgar language used by the statues to scare away thieves or trespassers or to threaten rape intensifies and highlights the weapon-like nature of the phallus itself, an organ used so commonly in the verbal attack of the invective poems of Catullus, Martial and Juvenal. Priapus and his phallus become weak and impotent, “sexually-depraved and degenerate” a caricature of the “Roman male at his lowest level of ruthless self-indulgence and lust,” in the final twenty-six poems.⁵⁷ The phallus in this final group of poems has amusingly been altered from its opening power, strength and high status, becoming a parody of contemporary Roman sexuality.

As a collection, all eighty of these poems present an “ironic contrast between redoubtable Priapus, source of life, god of creation, on the one hand, and the contemptible Priapus, the crude

⁵⁴ Parker comments that only 10 are wholly innocent, 31 dubious, 27 obscene and 12 very obscene.

⁵⁵ Parker, 41

⁵⁶ Richlin, Garden of Priapus, 121

⁵⁷ Parker, 43

wooden stock personifying the ultimate in turpitude and vice.” This dichotomy, pairing two unlikely characteristics in a comic setting, emphasizes the humor that is ultimately behind the common figure and attribute in every poem, Priapus and his phallus. In many of the poems, Priapus “in effect, was a veritable emblem of the connection between aischrology and rusticity: he often functions to promote and protect agricultural interests, he takes the form of an object commonly considered to be indecent and shameful (*aiskhro-*), and he speaks (*-logia*).”⁵⁸

The range of Priapus’ roles and appearance, and the variation of linguistic technique and style, are mirrored in the extensive use of different metaphors to refer to Priapus’ phallus. Just like Martial’s epigrams, the *Priapea* reveals a preference for primary obscenity, for the *mentula*.⁵⁹ The phallus, the *mentula*, appears throughout all three sections of the collection, the ‘religious’ poems, the threatening poems, and those parodies of Roman lust and debauchery. Just as Priapus’ phallus is not censored and hidden in the visual depictions of the god but rather is the central, prominent symbol, so too in *Priapea* 29 of the *Priapea*, the *mentula* is justifiably exposed. For if the god in art can *ostendis mihi coleos patentes* (show to me his displayed testicles), then it is only fair that these poems be filled with *improbisque verbis* (indecent words) and *mihi mentula est vocanda* (phallus must be said by me).

Whether in poems in the voice of Priapus threatening thieves or violators with rape, or in dedicatory epigrams summoning Priapus to help in issues of impotence, or in epigrams spoken by Priapus giving advice, the *mentula*, the primary, evident obscenity, is intended to be the active character of that specific poem, the unadulterated organ that, without qualifying adjectives, can expose, threaten, attack or elicit sympathy and awe. Priapus’ *mentula*, *luculenta* (splendid)(39.6), deserving to be garlanded with *coronis* (tributes) (50.7), worthy of the exclamatory *quot pondo*

⁵⁸ Rosen, Ralph, *forthcoming* “Comic Aischrology and the Urbanization of *Agroikia*” 12

⁵⁹ This word occurs 15 times within the eighty poems.

(with how much weight) (69.4), is something intrinsically linked to Priapus himself. This dominating, characteristic feature of Priapus so highlighted in the figural, painted and visual representations of the time, can be seen in the temporal adjectives linked to the *mentula* in the *Priapea*: the *mentula* is *semper aperta* (always open) (9.13), it *rumpatur...usque* (is burst open continually) (23.5), likewise, it *ne desit* (does not cease to be) (12.7). The exposed, unobstructed, unembellished, ever-present phallus becomes the primary weapon for the *Priapea*, its invective, its comedy, its parody.

The playful warning which Priapus issues in the first two epigrams, warning of the *mentula* which the *castas*, *Pierium chorum sorores auso dicere* (the chaste, the sisters of the Pierian chorus would not dare to say) (2.7), can be seen in its full effect in *Priapea* 68, a lampoon against Homer containing the most references to *mentula* in one poem (4 times). In this epigram, the phallus, not Homer's epics, are "the immortalizing factor...the penis represents the *vis naturae*."⁶⁰ The Muses, absent in the inspiration of the *Priapea* but ever so prominent in Homer's epics, are perhaps the cause of the *mentula*, which is such a positive force in the *Priapea*, to be transformed and ugly, *merdalea est* (covered in excrement) (68.8), in Homer. For without the *Troica...mentula* (Trojan phallus) which *Taenario placuisset...cunno* (had brought the Grecian cunt such fun), and *mentula Tantalidae bene si non nota fuisset* (if the phallus of Agamemnon had not been as well-known) he would not have pleased Chryses and therefore would not have quarreled with Achilles, and Homer would have never written his great epics, *non habuisset opus* (the work would not have been made). Priapus even states that the magic *moly* plant⁶¹ which Odysseus used to avert Circe is really a *mentula* (68.22). And Penelope creates a contest of *nervum tendebat* (stretching the bow) (68.33) to pick her new husband; but

⁶⁰ O'Connor, 153

⁶¹ In *The Odyssey* (10 302), the *moly* plant is described as an herb having a black root and a milky flower.

comically, with this double entendre on *nervum*, Penelope is actually judging who has the largest *mentula*. This ridiculous emphasis placed on the phallus, portraying it as the cause of the Trojan war, clearly reflects the overall intention of the phallus in the *Priapea*: to amuse, to entertain, or to attack but in a humorous way.

The variation of roles, themes and speakers in the *Priapea* is mirrored by the range of euphemisms for the phallus. Although the authors of the poems seem to prefer the primary obscenity *mentula* and the blunt, exposed characteristics that, by nature of its straightforward obscenity, went with the word, at times, the authors used many of the same allusions as contemporary poets: synecdoche, anatomical metaphors, weaponry or instrumental vocabulary, or vivid placement of letters, pronouns or adjectives suggesting the phallus. Just as in earlier and contemporary erotic poetry, *mentula* could be substituted by *nervus* or *vena*, words highlights its organ nature, with its veins and circulatory system; in the *Priapea*, the phallus can be a *libidinoso...nervo* (a lustful nerve) (63.14), a *nervis* which needs to be *fave* (blessed) (80.10), or, similarly, the phallus can take on the form of a *tenta...vena* (a tense vein) (33.2). Often in the *Priapea*, *pars* stands in for *mentula*, literally becoming a synecdoche, a part for the whole. *Pars* can be by itself (37.8), or qualified by an adjective: *obscena...pars* (obscene part) (9.1), *partem madidam* (wet part) (48.1), *parte...maiore* (enormous part) (30.1).

In addition to *pars*, alluding to the general area of the genitalia, anatomical metaphors could be used substituted for *mentula*. The phallus was often suggested by the larger, genital area: Priapus' exposed *inguen* (groin) has *tectum nulli vestibus* (a cover of no vest) (1.6); his *notam virilem* (sign of manhood) is something which might make one *adverteris* (turn away from) (66.1-2); his *pene* is *maxima* (18.1) and is worthy of being crowned with *inaurata...corona* (40.3).

When *mentula* is not replaced by another body part, organ or bodily sense, it is alluded to by various metaphors or word play. Perhaps Priapus' most common role in the *Priapea* is as guardian of the fields and gardens, a responsibility that requires him to be a violent threat to thieves and trespassers. Commonly, it is his phallus, his exposed *mentula*, which protects and threatens the space, but appropriately, weapons or sharp objects, alluding to the *mentula*, can serve as the instrument necessary to threaten. In each metaphor, the adjective that accompanies the replacement for *mentula* makes the image all the more explicit. The erect phallus can take the form of a *conto...pedali* (foot-long pole) (11.3), a *sceptrum, quod ab arbore est recisum...quod pathicae petunt puellae* (a staff which is cut from a tree...which pathetic girls seek) (25.1,3), an *arma* (weapon) which *te ventris...laxabunt* (has carved a hole in your stomach) (31.3), a speaking *hastam* (spear) made from *ligneus* (wood) which *aptetur veris usibus...rudis* (is put to good use) (43.1), a *tela* (tool) which Priapus would be sorry to lose (55.4), for without it, *hoc mihi si telum desit, inermis ero* (if this weapon ceased to be for me, I will be defenseless) (9.14).

The comic, threatening *mentula* in the *Priapea* does not always take the form of a weapon but is also alluded to by its more religious, sacred name, *fascinus*. However, this literary phallus does not carry the same reverence and significance of the archaeological *fascinus* that Pliny describes adorned the shrine of the Vestal Virgins, but rather is a humorous, violent threat.⁶² In *Priapea* 28, Priapus threatens angrily *pedicabere fascino pedali* (with my phallus I will penetrate you in the arse). In *Priapea* 79, the *fascinus* is not honored and prayed to but has become in literature something to be ashamed of and mocked: *Priape, quod sis fascino gravis tento,/ quod exprobravit hanc tibi suo verso/ poeta noster* (Priapus, our poet, in his verses, mocks this of yours that may be heavy with an erect phallus).

⁶² NH 28.7

Only in the *Priapea*, the largest collection of phallic poems, can the phallus be represented not by metaphors but by letters and word play. The *mentula* literally becomes an *impudentiae signum* (a sign of lechery) (63.13) in *Priapea* 54 where the placement of letters visually create a phallus: *CD si scribas temonemque insuper addas,/qui medium vult te scindere, pictus erit* (if you write C and D and you add a bar between them, it will be a picture which wishes to break your middle). The intended image is like a Pompeian graffiti, obscenely scrawled on walls.⁶³ The interactive word play can also be seen in *Priapea* 7 and 67. In *Priapea* 7, a riddle is formed from the “childish, effeminate, coquettish, or drunken” *blaesa lingua* (lispng tongue).⁶⁴ This linguistic puzzle, *nam te/pe-dico simper* (for I always say ‘p’ instead of ‘t’), makes an obscenity concerning pederasty, *pedico*, out of a seemingly innocent statement. Just as *Priapea* 7 exposes pederasty with a riddle, so too does *Priapea* 67 compose an elaborate acronym that uses mythical names to create the word *pedicare*.⁶⁵ This playful construction makes the written phallus into a visual depiction, creating a link between the phallus in literature and in visual imagery.

Conclusion

Although the function of the phallus as represented in amulets and plaques is inherently different from that in literature, often the artistic depiction closely matches the literary description. This superficial correspondence between the visual and written phallus, portraying similar characteristics and representations of the organ, further highlights the basic, core differences in their function. For example, the phallus, *calva...rufa...lusca* (bald, red and

⁶³ O’Connor, 143.

⁶⁴ O’Connor,

⁶⁵ *Penelopes primam Didonis prima sequatur/ et primam Cadmi syllava prima Remi,/ quodque fit ex illis, tu mi deprensus in horto,/ fur dabis: hac poena culpa luenda tua est.*

one-eyed), in Martial's Epigram 2.33 matches the material examples that merge the red colored phallus with the eye⁶⁶ (Figure 6, 77). But whereas the artistic visual depictions of the one-eyed, red phallus reveal the double apotropaic threat that the eye⁶⁷ and a phallus represent, countering the Evil Eye even more strongly, the same image of the phallus in literature is comic: the phallus in Martial's epigram is not divine, but rather is ugly, bald and something that no one would want to kiss.⁶⁸

And just as the portrayal of the phallus in Martial and in material artifacts may be similar while representing very different functions, so too does a ritual associated with the phallus in the *Priapea* make comedic a sacred phallic ritual in history. In worship of the ithyphallic god Liber, a phallus was paraded "in solemn procession" through the streets of Lavinium across the Forum and placed in its sanctuary where it was wreathed and garlanded by a well-respected woman, ensuring Liber's help in fertility and averting the Evil Eye⁶⁹ (Figure 6). The garlands that are solemnly and religiously placed on the phallus of Liber parallels the image of Priapus' phallus crowned in *Priapea* 40 and 50. But the garlands that crown Priapus are not signs of religious respect and reverence but rather are made humorous. In *Priapea* 40, a prostitute, thanking Priapus for her freedom from her trade, honors the god, *cingit inaurara penem tibi sancte corona:/ hunc pathicae summi numinis instar habent* (she solemnly girds your phallus with gilded garlands: in you the whores have an image of supreme godhead). Even the use of the word *sancte* in this farce highlights the parody of the sacred phallic ritual to Liber: Priapus' phallus is not honored by well-respected women, intended to protect fields or promise fertility, but rather is garlanded by prostitutes. And again, in *Priapea* 50, a man promises to crown Priapus' phallus

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3, notes 104 and 105 for examples of the eye and the phallus merged.

⁶⁷ The eye can itself also be a charm against evil and menace

⁶⁸ *Cur non basio te, Philaeni? Calva es./ Cur non basio te, Philaeni? rufa es./ Cur non basio te, Philaeni?lusca es./ haec qui basia, o Philaeni, fellat.* Philaenis is a reputed author of Greek manual modes of sexual intercourse.

⁶⁹ Augustine *CD* 7.21 relates this tale

with garlands if Priapus makes the devotee's girlfriend sleep with him: *Priape, nostris/ cingemus tibi mentulam coronis* (we will surround your phallus with our crowns). The phallus is not a religious symbol averting danger but rather is a lustful, comic symbol that may only be honored if the devotee is sexually pleased and fulfilled.

Perhaps the vast difference in the function of the phallus in visual depictions and in literature can be attributed to very general, fundamental differences between the two, contemporary media: one comprehensive, both religious and serious as well as comic and obscene; the other secularized, focused, and deliberately and ironically distanced from the solemn. This distinction helps to explain the differences of artistic content as determined by the different formal requirements of the visual and the verbal arts.

The Romans often paired the serious and the comedic. In rituals and festivals, humor served as a counterpoint to the solemn, religious function it accompanied. For example, the festival of the Lupercalia, founded in legend, a religiously important, traditional celebration to expiate and purify new life in Spring, involving lustration and fertility magic, included the rituals to incite laughter and amusement.⁷⁰ This juxtaposition can also be seen in the wedding songs of the time. The Hymenaeus was a traditional wedding song, derived from Greek tradition, invoking the marriage-god. But amidst the serious ritual and wish for good luck inherent in these wedding songs was an element of stylized obscenity.⁷¹ The written obscenity⁷² could also be

⁷⁰ During the festival of Lupercalia, a festival embodying both fertility aspects and the concept of marking and securing boundaries, two goats were sacrificed. After this, the foreheads of two boys were smeared with the blood, which was wiped off with wool soaked in milk, after which the boys were obliged to smile and laugh. Luperci afterwards, almost naked except for a girdle made from the skins of the sacrificed goats, ran round the Palatine Hill, striking bystanders (mostly girls) with goat-skin thongs, an activity that was supposed to ensure fertility. It is thought that the ithyphallic god Faunus may have been the deity worshipped at the Lupercalia. For another example of a religious festival with comic obscenity see the Floralia (mentioned by Martial in the Prologue to Book I of his epigrams).

⁷¹ See Catullus 61, 62 and 64, wedding songs with obscenities as well. Poem 62 contains many sexual euphemisms about the loss of virginity (*ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,/ ignotus pecori, nullo convulsus aratro* or *cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem*) and genitalia (*ut vidua in nudo vitis quae nascitur arvo*).

performed in a ritual, religious setting. The comic vulgarity in Plautus' plays, containing many euphemistic references to the phallus,⁷³ complemented the religious festival in honor of the Magna Mater during which the plays were performed.⁷⁴ The Romans abided by the belief that there was a time and place appropriate for everything: the religious solemnity of the phallic plaques was a fitting symbol to protect the house; the comedic humor of the written phallus matched what was, according to Horace, the putative function of the literature itself---to amuse and to instruct.

The purpose of the comic and satiric writing of Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Horace, Tibullus and the authors of the *Priapea* is not to be read with religious seriousness; this elite literature has its own thoroughly, socially critical, secular function, to be performed in an amusing, entertaining way. These comedic poems are not the verbal equivalents of the seriousness of the religious phallic plaques and amulets.⁷⁵ In this pointedly secular literature, the phallic image and the word can be seen as stark opposites, representing two completely polar functions of the same organ: the phallic plaques and amulets, the most solemn of the artifacts, ensuring protection, represented the semi-divine, religious powers of the phallus; the invective,

⁷² The movement away from the religious in verbal arts can be seen in the secularization of Roman comedy and the building of permanent theaters beginning in the late Republic, placing potentially volatile religious and popular gatherings within the control of the political elite. A corresponding phenomenon, the secularization of tragedy in Athens, is thoroughly studied in Richard Seaford's *Reciprocity and Ritual*. The mild sexual euphemisms found in New Comedy, as opposed to the more vulgar obscenities of Old Comedy, were "probably confined largely to lower-class characters" (Adams, 218). The plays of Terence contain no primary obscenities or current metaphors; sexual practices take the form of metonymy. In Plautus' plays however, sexual euphemisms can be found particularly in jokes (he did avoid primary obscenities as well). Plautus used anatomical (*aratiuncula*, *cucumis*, *fundus*, *gladius*, *inferior*, *guttur*, *machaera*, *peculium*, *radix*, *saltus*, *testis*, *vagina*, *vas*) and verbal (*aro*, *dirumpo*, *divido*, *inforo*, *scando*, *tero*) metaphors. It is generally believed that primary obscenities (as well as sexual metaphors) could be found in mime and farce (*pedico* appears in both genres) (Adams, 219). In epigram 3.86.4, Martial likens the obscenity found in epigram to that found in mime.

⁷³ For examples of Plautine phallic euphemisms, see *Pseud.* 1188 (*pecullium*), *Poen.* 863 (*vas*), *Mil* 1398 (*abdomen*).

⁷⁴ It is generally considered that Plautus' plays were performed in the square in front of the temple of the Magna Mater on the southwest corner of the Palatine during the *ludi Megalenes*, games in her honor. These games were the setting for productions of Plautus' *pseudolus* in 191 B.C. (attested by a fragmentary didascalion of the play that preserves the date and the occasion of its performance) and for many of Terence's plays in the 160s B.C.

⁷⁵ Although an examination of the role of the phallus in the less developed, popular verbal arts is beyond the scope of this thesis, it seems reasonable to conjecture that verbal correspondences to the seriousness of the religious phallic plaques and amulets might have left substantial traces in the epigraphic record.

and often absurd or disguised *mentula* in Latin poetry, invoking laughter, reflected the comedy and obscenity of the phallus.

But the bridge between these two extremes can be seen in laughter itself: the apotropaic laughter of the grotesque, exaggerated, humorous phallus of Priapus, the dancing macrophallic pygmies, or the ithyphallic bath servants, and the obscene laughter of the invective elegies and epigrams of Martial, Catullus and the *Priapea*. Both these comedic types of representation of the phallus in visual art and in literature wittily play with the solemn, established protective phallus, a playful conceit that would only be possible in a culture and society where the religious phallus of established belief played an integral role. The phallus in both these types of depictions is aestheticized, embedding the potential vulgarity of the phallus in an elegant, stylized, finely composed form: the carefully sculpted marble of an ithyphallic Priapus statue or the exquisite linguistic structure of a written poem.

Appendix A: Phallic Amulets in the Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Introduction: The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology possesses a large collection of phallic amulets, in bronze, bone and faience. This assortment of phallic representations, in the form of ornaments or pendants, of various sizes and complexity of design, allows for their comprehensive study and survey as a specific collection of objects of this type. Although the provenance of these objects remains unknown, most of them were gifts from Maxwell Sommerville, a major donor to the Museum, and are classified as “Late Roman” (for a discussion of Maxwell Sommerville, see Dietrich Berges, Hidden Treasures from the Vault: Engraved Gems from the Maxwell Sommerville Collection. *Expedition* 41/1, 17-28). This catalogue, arranging the artifacts by material type, will serve as a complement to the broad range of material phallic artifacts discussed in-depth in Chapter 3.

Bronze Materials

Fig. 1, 1; Bronze Ornament 29-196-8

This ornament has a flat backed mount and is in the general shape of the genital region. Rough corrosion covers much of the front. The shaft protrudes from the flat backing. Below the shaft, two slightly raised testicles and the scrotum hang, highlighted by a slight groove in relief. Dimensions: 41x37mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,1

Fig. 1,2; Bronze Pendant 29-196-13

Flat backed mount with large central ring for suspension at the top. In the center of the pendant are a phallus and scrotum. To the viewer's left, a shaft stretches perfectly horizontally out from the mount, as a hand from a body might; to the viewer's right, an arm, with fingers in an apparent fist, stretches perfectly horizontally out from the mount. The fingers in the fist appear to be making a *mano fica* gesture, with the thumb thrust between the middle and pointer fingers, suggesting copulation or the foreskin pulled back. There is some rough corrosion on the front of the pendant. Dimensions: 27x24mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig1,2

Fig.1,3; Bronze Pendant 29-196-14

This pendant is similar to 29-196-13 in form, with a large central ring for suspension. The central phallus and the scrotum protrude three-dimensionally from the mount. To the viewer's right, an arm with a clenched fist extends horizontally from the mount; to the left, a shaft, with outlined head, extends from the mount. The fist on the left extended arm does not appear to be making the *mano fica* gesture. The bronze of this



Fig.1,3

pendant has slight corrosion.
Dimensions: 46x24mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville

Fig.1,4; Bronze Pendant 29-196-15

This pendant is in the form of a fully sculpted phallus and scrotum, with a large ring for suspension behind the base of the shaft. The testicles are very small in proportion to the shaft. The bronze is has little corrosion or greenening not corroded or greened. Dimensions: 33x20mm.

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,4

Fig. 1,5; Bronze Pendant 29-196-16

This pendant is in the form of a double phallus with a central perforation. The heads and tips of both phalli are carved in relief. The bronze seems to be greened. In the center of the pendant there appear to be pock marks of some sort. Dimensions: 37x7mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,5

Fig.1,6; Bronze Pendant 29-196-17

This pendant is symmetric in form, with a central ring for suspension, balanced on either side by horizontal extensions: one extension in the form of a phallus, the other in the form of an arm and hand. The phallus is incised with detail, outlining the head and tip of the shaft; in a parallel composition, the hand is marked off from the rest of the arm, outlining each finger carefully. The hand is making the *mano fica* gesture, with the thumb thrust between the pointer and middle fingers. The bronze is well preserved with only slight corrosion or greenening. Dimensions: 66x21mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,6

Fig.1,7; Bronze Pendant 29-196-18

This pendant is similar in form to Fig1,2 and Fig. 1,3. There is a central ring for suspension in the middle between two horizontal extensions. To the viewer's right, an arm and hand stretch out; to the left, a phallus stretches out. Just as in the other amulets, the head of the phallus is incised and the fingers on the hand are forming the *mano fica* gesture. The fingers on this hand are not simply incised markings but rather are three-dimensionally sculpted. Below the two extensions, in the center of the pendant, a second phallus (with incised head) and scrotum hang. The bronze is slightly greened. Dimensions: 70x39mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,7

Fig. 1, 8; Bronze Pendant 29-196-19

This pendant is similar to Fig 1,2, Fig.1,3 and Fig.1,4 but has an arm and hand with incised fingers extending to the left side, and a phallus, with incised head, to the right. The fingers on the hand do not appear to be making the typical *mano fica* gesture. A penis and scrotum hang beneath the large central ring for suspension. The bronze is somewhat greened and smoothly corroded. Dimensions:52x31mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,8

Fig.1, 9; Bronze Pendant 29-196-21

This pendant is in the form of a double phallus with a scrotum hanging between the two organs. In line with the scrotum is a central ring for suspension. The bronze of this pendant is greened and there is some corrosion. Dimensions: 54x26mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.1,9

Fig. 1, 10; Bronze Pendant 29-196-22

This pendant is in the form of a double phallus (like Fig. 1,9) but has a central phallus and scrotum hanging beneath the very large central ring. The tip of the extended phallus on the viewer's left is pointed and distinct, differing from the rounded head of the right-hand extended phallus to the viewer's right. There is some corrosion and green color to the pendant in its present state. Dimensions: 84x52mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig. 1,10

Fig. 1,11; Bronze Pendant Ornament 29-196-25

This unusual pendant has two large, rounded testicles. The central perforation for suspension is small in comparison to the glands. There is no phallus present. The bronze of this pendant is fairly greened. Dimensions: 21x17mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig. 1,11

Fig. 1,12; Bronze Pendant Ornament 29-196-26

This pendant takes an interesting form. From the bottom-most edges of the large central ring for suspension hang two extended phallic objects with enlarged, exaggerated heads. The bronze of this pendant is greened. Dimensions: 28x16mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig. 1,12

Fig. 1, 13; Bronze Pendant 31-19-10

This pendant is similar in form to Fig. 1,9, with a double phallus. Between the two organs, a central scrotum hangs beneath the central ring for suspension. The head of the phallus extended on the right-hand side is very clearly incised with detail. The tip of the phallus to the



Fig. 1,13

left side is pointed much like the right side extended phallus of Fig. 1, 10. The bronze shows very little corrosion.

Length: 4.8cm.

Gift of Arthur H. Lea, April 1931

Fig. 1, 14; Bronze Ornament 31-19-43

This ornament is similar in form to Figs.1, 2-1,4 and to Fig.1,8. The pendant has two horizontal extensions from the middle central ring: on the left side, an arm with a hand extends; on the right side, a phallus with incised and detailed head extends. The fingers on the left side hand are clenched in a *mano fica* gesture. Beneath the central ring hang a narrow phallus and scrotum. The bronze is not corroded. Dimensions:5x3.6cm. Gift of Arthur H. Lea, April 1931



Fig.1,14

Bone Materials

Fig.2,1; Bone Pendant 29-196-12

This extremely small pendant is in the form of a phallus and a scrotum on a flat-backed mount. It very closely resembles the phallic pendants made of faience (Figs.3,1-2). The bone does not appear to be polished on the pendant and it is blackened. Dimensions:16x9mm Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.2,1

Fig.2,2 Bone Pendant 29-196-20

This pendant is in the form of a double phallus, with a scrotum between the two organs. The head of the phallus on the left side is incised for detail. The area around the scrotum appears to have traces of marks, possibly suggesting pubic hair. Above the scrotum is a small



Fig. 2,2

ring for suspension. The bone is polished and smooth. Dimensions:51x20mm.
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville

Fig.2,3 Bone Pendant 29-196-23

This large pendant is in the form of a phallus and a scrotum. There is a perforation for suspension. The shaft of the phallus is very long. The head is incised with a deep groove as is the area around the testicles. The bone is polished and smooth. Length:82mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.2,3

Fig.2,4 Bone Ornament 29-196-24

This circular ornament has as its central and only decoration a phallus and a scrotum in relief. The edges of the circular ornament are scalloped. Surrounding the phallus and scrotum are four symmetrical holes, forming a rectangular shape, perhaps for attachment purposes. The phallus and scrotum are carefully incised for added detail. The shaft of the phallus is quite wide. The appearance of this ornament is very similar to the type common in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire (For an example of a red-deer antler ornament of this type, see London, British Museum M 516. and Catherine Johns' Sex or Symbol, page 64).
Dimensions 55x50mm
Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.2,4

Fig. 2,5 Bone Ornament 29-196-27

This object is in the form of a phallus combined with a hand. This ornament is somewhat similar in shape to Fig.1,5, but this bone object does not have two phalli projecting horizontally outward but rather a phallus on the right-hand side and a hand extending to the left. The head of the phallus is incised for



Fig.2,5

detail, and the fingers of the hand are carefully carved. The fingers of the hand could be making the *mano fica* gesture though this cannot fully be asserted.

Dimensions: 28x7mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville

Faience Materials:

Fig.3,1 Faience Pendant 29-196-9

This small pendant is in the form of a phallus and a scrotum projecting outward from a flat-backed mount. At the top of the testicles, in the center of the pendant, is a small ring for suspension. This pendant is similar to the bone pendant Fig.2,1.

Dimensions: 18x11mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.3,1

Fig.3,2; Faience Pendant 29-196-10

This pendant is very similar in size and style to Fig.2,1 and Fig.3,1. It is in the form of a phallus and a scrotum, with a small central ring for suspension directly above the testicles. The head of this phallus is carefully incised for detail.

Dimensions: 18x11mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.3,2

Fig.3,3; Faience Pendant 29-196-11

This small pendant takes the form of a phallus and a scrotum. The shaft is somewhat small in proportion to the large size of the surrounding scrotum. Unlike Figs.3,1-2, this pendant does not have a flat back but is rather sculpted in the round. Dimensions: 19x11mm

Gift of Maxwell Sommerville



Fig.3,3

Appendix B: Phallic Euphemisms Discussed in Chapter 4

LATIN EUPHEMISMS

<i>aluta</i>	Martial 11.60				
<i>arma</i>	Martial 6.73.6	Priapea: 31.3			
<i>beta</i>	Catullus 67.21				
<i>bracchia macra</i>	Priapea 72.4				
<i>C and D (the letters)</i>	Priapea 54				
<i>cauda</i>	Cicero fam 9.22.2				
<i>cicer</i>	Juvenal 6.373B				
<i>columna</i>	Martial 6.49.3, 11.51.1	Priapea 10.8			
<i>fascinum</i>	Priapea 28.3, 79.1				
<i>hasta</i>	Priapea 43.1				
<i>inguen</i>	Martial 3.81.5, 7.30.5, 7.58.4	Priapea 1.6	Juvenal 1.41, 6.370	Horace Sat. 1.8	
<i>inguinis arma</i>	Martial 6.73.6				
<i>latus</i>	Priapea 26.11	Catullus 6	Martial 7.58.3, 12.97.4		
<i>lumbus</i>	Catullus 16.11	Martial 5.78.28	Priapea 19.4		
<i>medius</i>	Priapea 54.2	Martial 2.61.2, 3.81.2	Catullus 80.6		
<i>Mentula</i>	Martial (48 times) some examples: 1.35.5, 1.58.3, 3.69.1, 3.75.1, 3.76.3, 3.91.12, 6.23.2, 7.18.12, 7.30.8, 10.63.8, 11.15.8, 11.19.2	Priapea- 15 times; 9.13, 12.7, 23.5, 29, 39.6, 50, 68 (4 times)	Catullus 29.13, 37.3, 94.1, 105.1, 114.1, 115.1, 115.8		
<i>mut(t)o</i>	Martial 3.73.1, 11.63.2				
<i>nervus</i>	Priapea 63.14, 68.33, 80.10	Juv. 9.34, 10.205	Catullus 67.27		
<i>passer</i>	Catullus 2-3	Martial 11.6.16			
<i>penis</i>	Catullus 15.9, 25.3	Cicero fam 9.22.2	Martial 3.82.17	Juvenal 9.43	Priapea 40.3, 18.1
<i>pipinna</i>	Martial 11.72.1				
<i>sicula</i>	Catullus 67.21				
<i>Sopio</i>	Catullus 37.10	CIL IV.1700			
<i>telum</i>	Priapea 9.14, 55.4				
<i>temo</i>	Priapea 54.1				
<i>tendo</i>	Catullus 80.6	Priapea 23.4, 33.5, 33.2, 68.33, 79	Martial 6.71.3, 7.67.2, 11.58.1, 11.73.3	Juvenal 11. 169	
<i>vena</i>	Martial 4.66.12, 6.49.2, 11.16.5	Priapea 33.2			
<i>venus</i>	Martial 3.75.6, 1.46.2	Juvenal 11.167			
<i>verpa</i>	Martial 11.46.2	CIL IV.1655, 1884, 2360, 2415, 4876, 8617	Juv. 14.104 (circumcised)	Catullus 47.4	Priapea 34.5

Figures:

Chapter 1



Figure 1: Plaque from Thera (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2004)



Figure 2: Delos Dionysus (Image taken from Johns, 14)



Figure 3: Villa of the Mysteries (Image taken from <http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/timelines/rome/empire/vm/villaofthemysteries.html>)



Figure 4: Phallic Procession: Attic BF cup ca. 560 Florence 3897 (Image taken from Csapo, Plate 3)



Figure 5: Apulian red-figure calyx-krater by Tarpoley painter ca 400 BC NY 24.97.104 (Image taken from Csapo, Plate 2B)



Figure 6: Attic RF skyphos, later 5th century Munich 8934 (Image taken from Csapo, Plate 1B)



Figure 7: Marble Herm (Image taken from Johns, 14)



Figure 9: Dionysus vase as herm (Image taken from Johns, 81)



Figure 10: Dionysus as a herm with Venus (Image taken from Johns, Image 9)



Figure 8: Cupid Herm from Pompeii (Image taken from Johns, image 18)



Figure 11: Hermes and bird on vase (Image taken from Johns, 149)

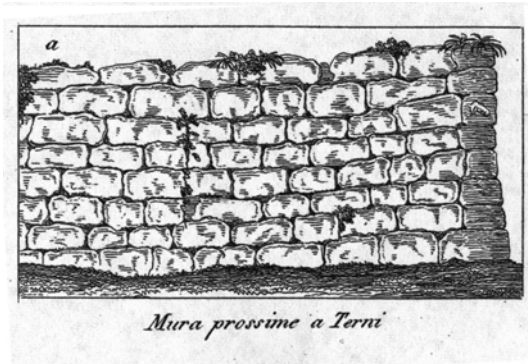


Figure 12: Terni wall (Image taken from Micali, Plate XIII)

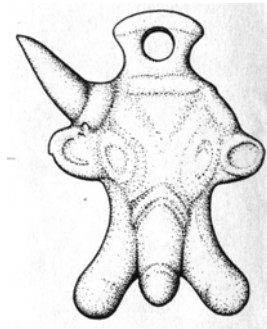


Figure 15: Bull amulets (Image taken from Plouviez, Judith. "Whose Good Luck? Roman Phallic Ornaments from Suffolk.,"2005 Fig.1,7).



Figure 13: Etruscan Wall: carving on the Via Flaminia just S of Narni.

(Image taken from http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/Europe/Italy/_Periods/Roman/Archaic/Etruscan/_Texts/DENETR*/38.html)



Figure 16: Tomb of the Lioness (Image taken from Holloway, R.Ross. "The Bulls in the 'Tomb of the Bulls' at Tarquinia." *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), fig. 3)

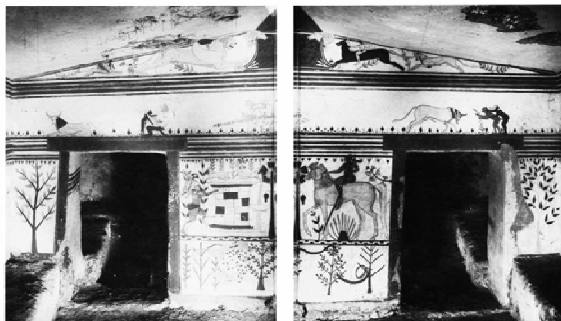


Figure 14: Tomb of the Bulls (Image taken from Holloway, R.Ross. "The Bulls in the 'Tomb of the Bulls' at Tarquinia." *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), figs.1-2)



Figure 17: Tomb of the Mouse (Image taken from Steingraber, No.119)



Figure 18: Tomb of the Jugglers (Image taken from Steingraber, No.70)



Figure 21: A woman sprinkling phalli at a festival (Image taken from Johns, Image 5)



Figure 19: Coin of Q. Titus of Mutinus Titinus (Image taken from <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/sear5/s0238.html>)

Chapter 2:



Figure 22: Terracotta phallus from Marseille (Image taken from Hermary, 62)



Figure 20: Scene of hetairai dancing around a model phallus (Image taken from Johns, 43)



Figure 23: Vettii Priapus (Image taken from Clarke, John. *Roman Sex: 100B.C. - 250A.D.*, p.21)



Figure 24: Plainer A (Image taken from Neilson, Fig.2)



Figure 27: Aquilia Funerary Altar with Priapus

Chapter 3:



Figure 25: Pisa Ship E (Image taken from Neilson, Fig.1)



Figure 27: Statue of Priapus from House of the Vetii (VI.15.1) (Image taken from Clarke, John. Roman Sex: 100B.C.- 250A.D., p.20)



Figure 26: Bronze Proembolion (Image taken from Neilson, Fig.3)



Figure 28: Triclinium at 1.13.16 (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol. II, pages 928-29)



Figure 29: Triclinium at 1.13.16 (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol. II, pages 928-29)



Figure 30: Thermopolio Phallus: VI.16.33 (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol. V, page 963)



Figure 31: Priapus from the House of Magic Rites (II.1.12) (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol. III, pages 19-20)



Figure 32: Lupanar Priapus (VII.12.18-20) (Image taken from Clarke. *Roman Sex*, page 62)



Figure 33: House of Menander (Image taken from Clarke. *Roman Sex*, page 110)



Figure 34: Dancing pygmies (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol VIII., p.720)



Figure 35: Hanc Ego Cacavi (Image taken from Clarke. *Roman Sex*, page 99)



Figure 36: Phallus Boat (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol VIII., p.723)



Figure 37: VII.2.32 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 38: Right of doorway at VII.1.36 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 39: Left of doorway at VII.1.36 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 40: VII.3.22-23 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 43: VII.11.12 (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol.VII, p. 476)



Figure 41: VII.4.26-27 (Image taken from Ling, Page 55)



Figure 44: Via Abbondonza (Regio VII, *insula* 13) (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 42: Casa del Marianaio (VII.15.2) (Image taken from Carratelli, Vol.VII, p. 765)



Figure 45: IX.1.5 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 46: IX.2.6-7 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 47: IX.1.13-14 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 48: IX.5.1 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 49: Phallus emanating from wall now in Naples *Gabinetto Segreto* (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 50: IX.7.1-2 (Image taken from Clarke, *Roman Sex*, page 101)



Figure 51: 1.20.5 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 52: VI.5.16 (Image taken from Ling, 52)



Figure 55: III.4 (Image taken from Ling, 51)



Figure 53: VI.Insula Occidentalis.3-4
(Image taken from Ling, 52)



Figure 56: VI.14.28 (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 54: VI.2.24-25 (Image taken from Ling, 51)



Figure 57: Hic Habitat Felicitas (Image taken from Clarke, *Roman Sex*, p.102)



Figure 58: Plaque from Herculaneum
(Image taken from Maiuri, Fig. 415)



Figure 59: Phallic Plaque at Ostia
(Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 60: *In-situ* photo of phallic plaque
at Ostia (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 61: Baths of Buticosus (Image taken
from Clarke, Looking at Lovemaking, page 135)



Figure 62: Tomb 16 at Isola Sacra (Image
taken from Clarke, Art in the Lives, figure 123)



Figure 63: Domus di Juppiter Fulmitore
(Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 64: Amulets from British Museum (Image taken from Johns, image 10)



Figure 65: Horse amulet (Image taken from White, 40)



Figure 66: Collection of Tintinabulla (Image taken from Clarke, *Roman Sex*, pages 24-25)



Figure 67: Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27837. (Image taken from Clarke, *Roman Sex*, page 96)



Figure 68: Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27853 (Image taken from Johns, image 14)



Figure 69: Mercury on Ram Tint. Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27855 (Image taken from Johns, page 71)



Figure 72: Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27874 (Image taken from De Caro p.33)



Figure 70; Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27854 (Image taken from Johns, page 55)

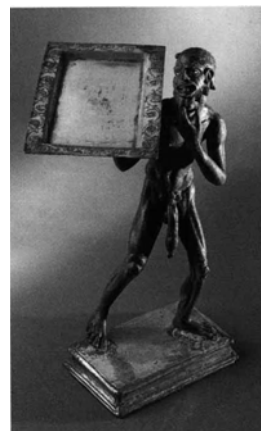


Figure 73: Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 143758-143761 (Image taken from De Caro p.31)



Figure 71: Phallic Lamp. Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27732 (Image taken from Johns, 51)



Figure 74: Phallic bird bowl (Image taken from Johns, page 93).



Figure 75: Phallic Amulet: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Res.08.320 (Image taken from Johns, page 72)



Figure 76: The Evil Eye (Image taken from Johns, page 68)



Figure 77: Chian Pottery (Image taken from Johns, page 66)



Figure 78: Manu fico (Image taken from Johns, page 73)



Figure 79: Votive Phalli (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)



Figure 80: Two phallic cippi (Image taken by Claudia Moser, 2005)

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